WHAT THE PUBLIC WANTS

A Play in Four Acts

By

Arnold Bennett

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WHAT THE PUBLIC WANTS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NOVELS

A MAN FROM THE NORTH
ANNA OF THE FIVE TOWNS
LEONORA
A GREAT MAN
SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE
WHOM GOD HATH JOINED
BURIED ALIVE
THE OLD WIVES' TALE
THE GLIMPSE
HELEN WITH THE HIGH HAND

FANTASIAS

THE GRAND BABYLON HOTEL
THE GATES OF WRATH
TERESA OF WATLING STREET
THE LOOT OF CITIES
HUGO
THE GHOST
THE CITY OF PLEASURE

SHORT STORIES

TALES OF THE FIVE TOWNS
THE GRIM SMILE OF THE FIVE TOWNS

BELLES-LETTRES

JOURNALISM FOR WOMEN
FAME AND FICTION
HOW TO BECOME AN AUTHOR
THE TRUTH ABOUT AN AUTHOR
THE REASONABLE LIFE
HOW TO LIVE ON TWENTY-FOUR HOURS A DAY
THE HUMAN MACHINE
LITERARY TASTE

DRAMA

POLITE FARCES
CUPID AND COMMONSENSE
WHAT THE PUBLIC WANTS

(IN COLLABORATION WITH EDEN PHILLPOTTS)
THE SINEWS OF WAR: A ROMANCE
THE STATUE: A ROMANCE

WHAT THE PUBLIC WANTS

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

ARNOLD BENNETT

LONDON
FRANK PALMER
12–14 RED LION COURT

First published 1910

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CHARACTERS

Sir Charles Worgan, Newspaper Proprietor
Francis Worgan, Wanderer
John Worgan, Provincial Doctor
} Brothers.

Saul Kendrick, Manager of Worgans, Ltd.
Holt St. John, Theatrical Manager.
Samuel Cleland, his Stage Manager.
Simon Macquoid, Dramatic Critic.
James Brindley, Earthenware Manufacturer.
Edward Brindley, his Son.
Page-boy.

Emily Vernon, Widow.
Mrs Cleland (Henrietta Blackwood).
Annie Worgan, Wife of John Worgan.
Mrs Worgan, Mother of the Worgans.
Mrs Downes.
Servant at John Worgan's.

Time :—To-day.

116452

WHAT THE PUBLIC WANTS

ACT I

Notes on Characters in this Act.

Sir Charles Worgan. — Brusque. Accustomed to power. With rare flashes of humour, and of charm. Well dressed, but not too carefully. Strong frame. Decided gestures. Age 40.

Francis Worgan.—A traveller, a philosopher, and something of a dilettante; rather afraid of coming to grips with life. Very well dressed, but with a touch of the unusual—for example, a quite fashionable collar with a soft necktie tied in a rather obtrusive bow. Talks quietly. Always punctiliously polite. Age 41.

Saul Kendrick.—Gross, stoutish, sporting. Dressed correctly, but without taste. Loud. His cigar is several sizes too large. His gestures are vulgar. Not gentlemanly, though by fits and starts he seems to remember that he is a gentleman. Age 50.

Emily Vernon.—Beautiful; but conscious that her youth is passing. Charming. Her moods change rapidly. She is dressed with distinguished taste, but not expensively. Her face is sad when she isn't alert. She has been through sorrow and through hard times. Age 29.

Simon Macquoid.—The only thing to note is that he is angry throughout his scene. Age 45.

Private office of Sir Charles Worgan. Doors R., L., and back centre. Utmost possible richness of office furniture. Grand central desk, with dictaphone and telephone. Side tables, full of papers, correspondence, etc. Large date-calendar prominent. A red disk showing on wall at back. General air of orderliness and great activity. Sir Charles Worgan and Kendrick are opposite each other at central desk, with two piles of assorted magazines and journals on the desk. Kendrick is smoking a large cigar. Time, afternoon, November.

Kendrick. Now then, there's this confounded *Sabbath Chimes*! [*picking up a periodical from the pile to his left hand*].

Sir C. Well, what's it doing?

Kendrick [*referring to a list of figures*]. Eighteen thousand.

Sir C. It's dropping, then.

Kendrick. Dropping? I should say it was! But it never was any real good. We bought it for a song and——

Sir C. [*interrupting him sharply*]. That's no reason! We bought the *Evening Courier* when its shares were at sixpence, and now it's earning a thousand pounds a week.

Kendrick. Yes, but the *Courier* isn't religious. You wouldn't call a halfpenny evening paper exactly religious, would you?

Sir C. What's that got to do with it? Do you mean to say there isn't a religious public?

Kendrick. I've never met it [*flicking ash off his cigar*].

Sir C. [*very slightly nettled*]. Now look here, Kendrick, we don't want to waste time in facetiousness. We still have quite twenty papers to go through [*fingering pile*].

Kendrick [*very slightly more deferential*]. I'm not joking, Sir Charles. What I say is—there are two things that are absolutely U.P. in this country; one is limericks, and the other is religion.

Sir C. That be damned! No one ever expected limericks to last; but let me tell you there's a lot of money in religion yet. [*Kendrick shrugs his shoulders.*] Let's have a squint at *Chimes* [*he turns the pages over*]. Hm! No! It isn't crisp enough. I ask you—does it look snappy? . . . . [*reading from it in a startled tone*]. "Problems of the Day: Are we growing less spiritual?" [*Angry.*] Great heavens! Whose idiotic notion was that?

Kendrick. Haliburton's.

Sir C. Well, that really is a bit too thick! You know, seriously, you ought to keep an eye on things better than that.

Kendrick [*hurt*]. I've been giving all my time to the sporting department. Think of the trouble I've had with the *Billiard Ball* alone, to say nothing of putting the *Racecourse* on its legs. I can't attend to everything, Sir Charles.

Sir C. [*still fuming*]. "Are we growing less spiritual?" As if anybody cared a tuppenny curse whether we are growing less spiritual or

not! No wonder the thing's dropping! What does the Reverend Mr Haliburton get?

Kendrick. Fifty pounds a month.

Sir C. Does he imagine he's going to earn fifty pounds a month, *here*, by asking the British public if it's growing less spiritual? Sack the fool. Where did you pick him up?

Kendrick. Religious Tract Society. Fished him out myself.

Sir C. Well, you'd better return him with thanks.

Kendrick. That's all very fine. Where shall we find some one to take his place? It isn't the first starving curate that comes along who will be able to run Haliburton's department. He's a worker.

Sir C. What's the good of his being a worker if he's never got the hang of our style? [*Holding out periodical.*] Look at it!

Kendrick. I'm not defending him. I'm only saying that to find ideas for *Sabbath Chimes*, *The Sunday Comrade*, *The Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Record*, *Sunday Tales*, *The Sunday School Teacher's Friend*, and *Golden Words*, is none so much of a blooming picnic. I wouldn't like to have to do it myself.

Sir C. [*less angry, persuasively*]. All right. As you please. You're responsible. But wake him up.

Kendrick. Why can't *you* give him a lead, Sir Charles?

Sir C. Me! You know perfectly well I have

all I can do for at least a couple of months, shoving the *Mercury*.

Kendrick. I was forgetting that for the moment.

Sir C. It must not be forgotten even for a moment that the *Daily Mercury* is the leading line of this Company. It must also not be forgotten that the circulation of the *Mercury must* touch a million before the Annual Meeting —even if the country has to go to war for it. No, my boy ; you've done wonders in the sporting department. And I'm sure you can do wonders in the religious department, once you really give your mind to it. [*Voices outside the door, back.*]

Kendrick. It doesn't seem to come so natural.

Sir C. Oh, nonsense ! The first thing you have to do is to make Haliburton understand what snap is. Take him out to lunch. Pour it into him. And tell him from me that if every one of those papers doesn't show a satisfactory profit in six months' time he will be at liberty to go into the mission field, and the farther off the better. Of course that "Are we growing less spiritual ?" rubbish must be stopped in the next number. [*Turning casually.*] What's going on outside ?

Kendrick [*ignoring the question*]. Yes, and supposing he asks me what's to take its place ?

Sir C. It's his business to find out. [*Handing paper to Kendrick.*]

Kendrick. But what *sort* of thing ?

Sir C. Well, now. Here's a good idea. What's the series called?

Kendrick. "Problems of the Day."

Sir C. What about this, then: "Ought curates to receive presents from lady-parishioners?"

Kendrick [*enthusiastic*]. By Jove! That's a great idea, that is! I wish you had a bit more time to spare, Sir Charles. [*Nods his head approvingly.*]

Sir C. [*pleased with himself*]. That ought to give him a start, anyhow.

Fran. Wor. [*off*]. Open that door, or you are a doomed boy. This dagger is tipped with a deadly poison.

Sir C. What in the name of—— [*Goes quietly to door, back, and opens it. The figures of Francis Worgan and a Page-boy are seen. A slight pause.*]

Francis [*entering, a sword-cane in his hand, very quietly*]. How d'ye do, Charlie? [*A pause.*]

Sir C. How do, Frank? [*They shake hands.*] Excuse me, will you, Kendrick?

Kendrick. Certainly, Sir Charles. [*Exit Kendrick, R. The Page-boy closes the door from outside.*]

Francis. Well, Charlie, I sympathise with you. I feel just the same as you do—very nervous.

Sir C. Nervous? What about?

Francis [*shutting up the sword-cane*]. About my demeanour. How ought brothers to behave who haven't seen each other for nineteen years?

Sir C. I perceive you aren't altered. [*They sit.*]

Francis. That's a hard thing to say. While I was waiting in your waiting-room I saw in a magazine called *Golden Words*, under the heading

"Pregnant Utterances of the Month," "We should all strive to do a little better every day. —Archbishop of Canterbury." That is what I've been doing for nineteen years—and you tell me I haven't altered!

Sir C. You know what I mean. I mean that you still make people wonder what the devil you will say next.

Francis. You've altered, anyhow. You couldn't have said anything as clever as that nineteen years ago.

Sir C. [*pleased*]. Think so? [*Pause.*]

Francis. However, physically you're astoundingly the same.

Sir C. So are you. [*A pause.*] I should have known you anywhere. When did you arrive?

Francis. Yesterday.

Sir C. Then I'm the first to see you. And where have you turned up from?

Francis. I've "turned up" from Japan. *Viâ* New York.

Sir C. What do you think of New York?

Francis. I don't think of it, except by inadvertence. [*Rising and going to disk, in a puzzled tone.*] What *is* that? I saw something like it outside the door, and downstairs in the den of the commissionaire.

Sir C. [*rising*]. That? It's an apparatus that shows whether I can be seen or not. The red disk is up now. That means I'm engaged and can't be seen by any one, appointment or no appointment! Putting it up here puts it up

outside the door and in the commissionaire's room. Here's the green disk—that means that I'm engaged but can be disturbed. Blue means that I'm here, alone. Yellow means that I'm not in my office, but somewhere in the building. And white means that I'm out. Ingenious, eh? [*In a serious tone.*] Absolutely necessary, you know.

Francis [*as they both sit down again*]. So that explains why I had such an exciting time in getting to see you.

Sir C. [*smiling*]. I'm supposed to be the most difficult man to see in London.

Francis. Yes, I noticed the commissionaire was wearing several medals. Doubtless for valour. First he made me fill up a form, as inquisitive as an income-tax paper. When I told him I had an appointment, he instructed me to sit down. So I sat down and read *Golden Words* for ten minutes. Then I thought it would be a good idea to tell him I was your brother, and not merely some one of the same name.

Sir C. What did he say then?

Francis. He told me to sit *down*, and gave me a sceptical look, as much as to say: "You're his brother, are you? Well, so am I!" So I sat down and read *The Lad's Own Budget* for ten minutes. Then, while he was busy torturing another applicant, I nipped into the lift just as it was going up, and began wandering about passages. I managed to catch a boy. What a lot of boys you have!

Sir C. By the way, is that stick really poisoned!

Francis. No. It was a notion I got out of *The Lad's Own Budget.* I was determined to see you, or perish in the attempt. I felt sure you couldn't be coming the great man over me, especially as I'd made an appointment. I'll say this for our family, at any rate—there's no affected nonsense about any of us.

Sir C. My dear chap, I hadn't the slightest notion you were in London. But how did you make an appointment? With my secretary?

Francis. Secretary! Didn't know you had one! No, I dropped you a line last night, and marked the letter "Private and Immediate."

Sir C. That's just where you made a mistake. We get about five thousand letters a day here. A van brings the first post every morning direct from St. Martin's-le-Grand. [*Going to a side-table, and fingering a large batch of letters.*] Our sorting clerks have instructions to put aside all letters addressed to me personally and marked private or urgent, and they are always opened last. [*Opening a letter.*] Yes, here's yours.

Francis. Why are they opened last?

Sir C. It's the dodge of every begging-letter writer in England to mark his envelope "Private and Urgent." [*Throws letter into waste-paper basket, after glancing at it.*]

Francis. I see. You may be said to have an organisation here!

Sir C. [*putting his hands in his pockets and smiling superiorly*]. You bet! Considerably over a

thousand people earn their bread and butter in this building, and wages run from five bob on to a hundred pounds a week. What price that, eh ?

Francis. Well, Charlie, we were never given to praising each other, but I'll go this far—you're a caution !

Sir C. I believe I am. In fact, I must be. I've revolutionised journalism, and I'm only forty. [*A pause.*] You're forty-one.

Francis. And the staid Johnny is forty-three. I was asking the mater the other day in a letter what she thought of having three sons all over forty.

Sir C. Does she make you write to her every week ?

Francis. Yes.

Sir C. So she does me, too. I never know what to say to her.

Francis. Been down to the Five Towns lately ?

Sir C. No—not lately. No time, you know.

Francis. And Johnny ? Does he come much to London ?

Sir C. Not often, I think. I imagine from what the mater says that his practice must be growing pretty rapidly.

Francis. What's his wife like ?

Sir C. Oh, very decent woman, I should imagine.

Francis. Your relations with the family appear to be chiefly a work of imagination, my boy.

Sir C. And what about yours ? Seeing that

not a single member of the family has set eyes on you for nineteen years——

Francis. But I'm different. I'm a wanderer. I'm one of those people who seem to have no pressing need of a home, or a national anthem, or relatives, or things of that kind. Of course one likes to meet one's relatives, sometimes.

Sir C. No home? But what on earth do you do with yourself?

Francis. I just go about and keep my eyes open —and try to understand what I see.

Sir C. Nothing else?

Francis. That takes me all my time.

Sir C. [*staring at him*]. It's you that's the caution, not me!

Francis. We're getting over it rather well, I think.

Sir C. Getting over what? What *do* you——

Francis. Over the awkwardness of this first interview. I hope I'm not interfering with business.

Sir C. [*heartily*]. Not in the least. My theory is that if a really big concern is properly organised, the boss ought to be absolutely independent of all routine. He ought to be free for anything that turns up unexpectedly. Anyhow, I am.

Francis. Well, I candidly confess that this business of yours is just a size larger than I expected.

Sir C. Yes, it's big—big. We own about forty different publications: two London dailies, three provincial dailies, five popular penny weeklies,

two sixpenny weeklies, three illustrated monthlies, four ladies' papers, six sporting and athletic, five religious papers, two Sunday papers——

Francis. What's the subtle difference between a religious paper and a Sunday paper?

Sir C. Oh, they're—well, they're quite different!

Francis. Really!

Sir C. Four halfpenny comic papers, four boys' papers, and I don't know what else.

Francis. I distinctly remember you saying once at school there wasn't a schoolboys' paper fit to wipe your feet on—you were always buying them to see.

Sir C. And there wasn't! It was a boys' paper I began with—*The Lad's Own Budget.* The schoolboy was the foundation of this business. And let me tell you our capital is now nearly two and a half millions.

Francis. The deuce it is!

Sir C. Yes, didn't you know?

Francis. No, and I suppose you're the principal proprietor?

Sir C. What do *you* think? Kendrick and I, we control a majority of the shares. Kendrick—that's the man who was here when you came in—gets a salary of five thousand a year.

Francis. Well, this is very interesting. I've had all sorts of disconcerting impressions since I reached Charing Cross twenty-four hours ago—when I saw that Exeter Hall was gone, reason tottered on her throne—but really, Charlie! Really, Charlie! It sounds a strange thing to

say of one's own brother—but you are the most startling phenomenon of the age.

Sir C. That's what I'm beginning to think myself.

Francis. Of course, you're a millionaire.

Sir C. Pooh! I was a millionaire six years ago. Surely you must have got a notion from the mater's letters?

Francis. Very vague! She chiefly writes about Johnny's babies.

Sir C. [*laughs shortly*]. It's true I never give her any precise details, lest the old lady should think I was bragging. She hates that.

Francis. I'm just the least bit in the world staggered.

Sir C. Well, there it is! [*leans back in his chair*].

Francis. All this, I suppose, from Uncle Joe's ten thousand.

Sir C. Precisely. What have you done with *your* ten thousand?

Francis. Nothing. Just lived on it.

Sir C. Do you mean to say you can live on the interest of ten thousand and travel?

Francis. Why, of course! All an Englishman has to do is to avoid his compatriots. What puzzles me is how you can get through even a decent fraction of *your* income.

Sir C. Oh! what with one thing and another, I get through a goodish bit. You heard I bought Hindhead Hall?

Francis. Yes. What did you buy it for?

Sir C. Well, I thought I ought to have a place in the country.

Francis. To go with the knighthood?

Sir C. If you like. You must come down and see Hindhead.

Francis. Great joke, that knighthood! What did they give it you for?

Sir C. Well—I'm supposed to be somebody.

Francis. I always thought knighthoods were given to nobodies.

Sir C. [*a little testily*]. That depends! That depends! And let me tell you that the knighthood is only a beginning.

Francis [*shortly*]. Ah! Only a beginning! Really! [*smiling*]. I say, what did Johnny say about the knighthood?

Sir C. Nothing.

Francis. What interests me is, *how* you managed to do it.

Sir C. Do what? Get the knighthood? That's——

Francis [*interrupting him brusquely*]. No. The—the success, the million, the splash.

Sir C. I can tell you this—I did it honestly. That's another thing about me—I'm probably the only millionaire in the world with a clear conscience. What d'ye think of that? People say that no one can make a million in ten years and not be a scoundrel. But I did. I've never tried to form a trust. I've never tried to ruin a competitor. I've never sweated my chaps. They have to work hard, and I give 'em pepper, and I'd

sack one as soon as look at him, but they are well paid—some of 'em are handsomely paid. The price of labour in journalism has gone up, and it's thanks to me. Another thing—I give the best value for money that ever was given.

Francis. Yes, but *how* did you do it? What's your principle?

Sir C. I've only got one principle. Give the public what it wants. Don't give the public what you think it ought to want, or what you think would be good for it; but what it actually does want. I argue like this. Supposing you went into a tobacconist's and asked for a packet of cigarettes, and the tobacconist told you that cigarettes were bad for you, and that he could only sell you a pipe and tobacco—what should you say? [*He rises, excited.*]

Francis. Now what *should* I say? I don't think I should be able to think of anything clever enough until I got outside the shop.

Sir C. [*not laughing, but insisting on his argument*]. You see my point, eh? You see my point? I've got no moral axes to grind. I'm just a business man [*more excitedly*].

Francis. My dear boy, I'm not contradicting you.

Sir C. I know, I know. But some people make me angry. There seems to be a sort of notion about that because it's newspapers I sell, and not soap or flannel, I ought to be a cross between General Booth, H. G. Wells, and the Hague Conference. I'm a manufacturer, just like the

fellows that sell soap and flannel: only a damned sight more honest. There's no deception about my goods. You never know what there is in your soap or your flannel, but you know exactly what there is in my papers, and if you aren't pleased you don't buy. I make no pretence to be anything but a business man. And my speciality is, what the public wants—in printed matter.

Francis. But how did you find out what it wants? I suppose it wasn't vouchsafed to you in a dream.

Sir C. [*hesitating*]. I—I don't exactly know. . . . I began by thinking about what I should want myself. *The Lad's Own Budget* was the first. I knew well enough what I wanted when I was a boy of twelve, for instance; and as most boys are alike—you see! . . . I put on the market a paper that I actually did want when I was twelve. . . . And you may believe me when I tell you that hot cakes were simply not in it, not *in* it! . . . . And so I went on, always keeping in mind—— [*Enter Page-boy with newspaper and letters, etc., on a salver. Exit.*]

Francis. So the red disk doesn't absolutely bar the door to everybody?

Sir C. What do you mean? Oh, the messenger! He always comes in at this time [*looks at clock*]. He's four minutes late, by the way [*looks at his watch*]. No, it's that clock [*glancing at paper and letters, then resuming his discourse*]. Always keeping in mind how I captured the boy of twelve. I've sometimes

thought of having an inscription painted over the door there : " Don't forget the boy of twelve "— [*hastily*] just for a lark, you know. At last I got as far as the *Daily Mercury*, and I don't fancy any newspaper proprietor in my time is likely to get much further. A twelve-page paper for a halfpenny and the most expensive news service on earth ! What do *you* think ? [*glancing again at letters*].

Francis. I must confess I've never read the *Mercury*.

Sir C. [*astounded*]. Never read the *Mercury* ! Everybody reads the *Mercury*.

Francis. I don't.

Sir C. [*solemnly*]. Do you seriously mean to say you've never read the *Mercury* ? Why, man, it's nine years old, and sells over nine hundred thousand copies a day.

Francis. I noticed it about everywhere in the streets this morning, and so I bought a copy, and put it in my pocket, intending to have a look at it, but I forgot. Yes, here it is [*taking folded paper from his pocket*].

Sir C. [*still astounded*]. Well, I *said* it was you who were the caution, and, by Jove, it is ! What *do* you read ?

Francis. When I'm out of reach of a daily post I read the *Times* Weekly Edition. Of course, my first care this morning was to get the *Manchester Guardian*. I always have that when I can.

Sir C. Surprising what a craze there is among

you cultured people for the *Manchester Guardian*! I'm always having that thrown at my head. Here! [*tossing over newspaper from salver*]. Here's the fourth edition of the *Evening Courier*, just off the machine. Never read that either, I suppose!

Francis. No.

Sir C. [*nodding his head as one with no further capacity for surprise*]. Well, well! It's a sort of evening *Mercury*. Have a look at it! Just excuse me for two minutes, will you? I must dictate one or two things at once. [*Sits down to dictaphone, and begins speaking into it.*] Mr Cookson. Write Medways — you know, the clock people——

Francis [*curious, examining*]. Hello! What's that dodge?

Sir C. It's a dictaphone. Never seen one before? Shorthand clerks get on your nerves so. You blaze away into it, and then it repeats what you've said to the clerk—elsewhere, thank heaven!

Francis. How amusing!

Sir C. [*into dictaphone*]—to cancel their contract for regulating clocks. They've been warned twice. Mine's four minutes fast. Write to Pneumatic Standard Time Company, or whatever its name is, and get an estimate for all the clocks in building. Typewriter. My dear Lady Calder, Many thanks for your most——

Francis [*looking at "Courier"*]. I say, who's Chate?

Sir C. Chate? Chate? He's a convict who

got ten years for killing his mother or something. Let off lightly under the First Offenders Act, I suppose. Immensely celebrated for his escape from Dartmoor Prison. They didn't catch him again for a fortnight. . . . Why?

Francis. Only because of this, all across the front page of the *Courier*: [*pointing*] "Chate, now at Holloway, comes out to-morrow."

Sir C. Ah! [*He suddenly gets up and goes to door, R., and opens it.*] I say, Kendrick, are you there? Just a second. [*Enter Kendrick.*]

Kendrick. Yes?

Sir C. Oh, Francis, this is Mr Kendrick. Kendrick, my brother.

Kendrick [*surprised*]. Glad to meet you, sir. [*They shake hands.*]

Sir C. [*to Kendrick*]. You arranged about Chate? [*Francis returns to study his newspapers.*]

Kendrick. Chate?

Sir C. I told you three months ago we must have his story written by himself for the *Sunday Morning News.*

Kendrick. Oh, yes! Well, it couldn't be done!

Sir C. Why?

Kendrick. We found that the *Sentinel* people had been paying his wife a pound a week for years on the understanding that they had his stuff when he came out.

Sir C. What do I care for the *Sentinel* people? If they have been paying a pound a week that's their look-out. We have got to have the story. If it's worked up properly it'll be——

Kendrick. Afraid it's too late now.

Sir C. Too late! Not a bit! Look here. Send young Perkins with a shorthand clerk. He must take the Renault car, and be outside Holloway Prison at five-thirty to-morrow morning. Let him have £200 in gold—gold, mind! You've time before the bank closes. He must be ready for Chate. The wife is certain to be there. Let him make friends with her. Tell her the car is absolutely at their disposal. He can suggest breakfast. They're bound to accept. Anyhow, let him get Chate into some private room somewhere, out of London if possible. Then he can show the money. He must *show* the money. Roll it about the table. Explain to Chate that the money will be handed over to him after he has talked for a couple of hours about his escape and so on, and signed his name. The clerk can come back here by train with the stuff; but Perkins must take Chate, and his wife too if necessary, off to the seaside for a jaunt. He must take 'em out and lose 'em till Saturday morning. It'll be too late for the *Sentinel* people to do anything then. And you must begin to advertise as soon as the clerk turns up with the stuff. Is it all clear?

Kendrick. Yes.

Sir C. Well, there's just time for the bank. Thanks very much.

Kendrick. By the way, I find there's a silly sort of mistake in the *Mercury* leader this morning.

Sir C. Oh! What?

Kendrick. Cettinje is mentioned as the capital of Bosnia.

Sir C. Well, isn't it?

Kendrick. Seems not. It ought to be Sarajevo. The worst of it is that it can't be explained as a slip of the pen, owing to unfortunate circumstantial details.

Sir C. Don't refer to it at all, then. Sit tight on it. I suppose that's Smythe's fault. [*Kendrick nods.*] Pity he's so careless—he's got more snap than all the rest of the crowd put together. I say, don't let them be too late for the bank.

Kendrick. No. [*In a lower voice.*] I hear a question is to be asked as to us in the House this afternoon.

Sir C. [*after a little pause*]. That's good! You might send that in to me as soon as it comes along.

Kendrick. Right oh! [*Exit, R.*]

Sir C. [*after looking at Francis, who is absorbed in newspapers, turns to dictaphone*]—kind invitation, which I am very sorry not to be able to accept, as I shall be out of town on Sunday. With kind regards, Believe me, Yours sincerely. Typewriter. Don't type this on *Mercury* paper. Mr. Cookson. Ask Mr. Smythe to come round and see me at my flat at nine to-morrow morning. Mark the appointment for me. [*Enter Kendrick.*]

Kendrick. Sorry to disturb you [*shutting door between the two rooms carefully, and speaking low*]. Here's——

Sir C. Have you given those instructions ?

Kendrick. Yes, yes. Here's Macquoid. He insists on seeing you, and as I know you want to humour him a bit——

Francis [*looking up from papers sharply*]. Is that Simon Macquoid the critic ?

Sir C. Yes. I've just taken him on for *Men and Women*—our best sixpenny weekly. He's pretty good, isn't he ?

Francis. Pretty good ! He's the finest dramatic critic in Europe. I should like to meet him.

Sir C. Well, you shall. Bring him in, Kendrick, will you ? [*Exit Kendrick.*]

Francis. He knows what he's talking about, that chap does, and he can *write*. [*Enter Kendrick and Macquoid.*]

Sir C. How do you do, Mr Macquoid ?

Macquoid [*very curtly*]. How do you do ?

Sir C. May I introduce my brother, Francis Worgan, an admirer of yours ?

Francis [*rising, and showing his pleasure*]. I'm delighted to——

Macquoid [*cutting him short*]. How do you do ? [*Exit Kendrick.*]

Sir C. Take this chair.

Macquoid. Sir Charles, I want to know what you mean by allowing additions to be made to my signed articles without my authority.

Sir C. [*quickly resenting the tone*]. Additions—without your authority !

Macquoid [*taking an illustrated paper from under his arm, and opening it*]. Yes, sir. I have gathered

since seeing this that you do it to other contributors ; but you won't do it to me. My article on the *matinée* at the Prince's Theatre ended thus, as I wrote it : "Despite the strange excellence of the play—which has in a high degree the disturbing quality, the quality of being *troublant*—the interpretation did not amuse me. Mr Percival Crocker, 'abounding,' as the French say, 'in his own sense,' showed pale gleams of comprehension ; the rest of the company were as heaven made them." That's how I finished. But I find this added, *above* my signature [*in a shocked tone*] : "This performance is to in all probability be followed by three others." [*Stands aghast.*] Look at it ! [*hands paper to Sir C.*].

Sir C. [*stiffly*]. Well, Mr Macquoid, there's surely nothing very dreadful about that. I have no doubt we put it in to oblige the theatre. Moreover, I see that without it the page would have been two lines short.

Macquoid. Nothing very dreadful ? "To-in-all-probability-be-followed." It's an enormity, sir, an enormity !

Sir C. [*very stiffly*]. I'm afraid I don't quite follow you.

Francis. Mr Macquoid no doubt means the split infinitive.

Macquoid. I should think that I did mean the split infinitive ! I was staggered, positively staggered, when I looked at my article. Since then I've been glancing through your paper, and I find split infinitives all over it ! Scarcely a page

of the wretched sheet without a portrait of a chorus girl and a split infinitive! Monstrous!

Sir C. I regret the addition, but I'm bound to say I don't understand your annoyance.

Macquoid. Regret is useless. You must put in an apology, or at any rate an explanation, in next week's issue. I have my reputation to think about. If you imagine, Sir Charles, that because you pay me thirty pounds a month you have the right to plaster my work with split infinitives, you are tremendously mistaken.

Sir C. [*shortly and firmly*]. We shall not apologise, Mr Macquoid, and we shall not explain. It would be contrary to our practice.

Macquoid [*furious*]. You are unscrupulous, Sir Charles. Get another dramatic critic. I've done with you. Good-day. [*Exit quickly.*]

Sir C. [*laughing in spite of himself*]. Well, of all the infernal cheek! That's the worst of these cultured johnnies. They're mad, every one of 'em. [*In a different tone.*] I say, what *is* a split infinitive?

Francis. A split infinitive is a cardinal sin.

Sir C. Apparently. But what is it?

Francis. In our beautiful English tongue, the infinitive mood of a verb begins with the particle "to."

Sir C. [*thinking of Macquoid*]. Damn the fellow!

Francis. Thus, "to swear." Now the "to" must never, never be separated from its verb, not even by a single word. If you write "To swear foolishly," you are correct. But if you write "To

foolishly swear," you commit an infamy. And you didn't split your infinitive with one word, you split it with three. Imagine the crime.

Sir C. And do you mean to say that you cultured people care about that sort of thing?

Francis. You see it's worth thirty pound a month to Macquoid.

Sir C. Ah! But he's in the Civil Service. Half of them are. [*Sir Charles has rung a bell, and taken a record out of the dictaphone. Enter Page-boy, to whom he hands the record in silence. Exit Page-boy.*]

Francis [*putting his two newspapers on his knee*]. I suppose the question in Parliament that Mr What's-his-name mentioned is about the Anglo-German crisis that I see in both these papers.

Sir C. You may depend it is. We're running that for all it's worth. If that two-column special telegram from Constantinople doesn't wake up the B.P. to what Germany is doing in the Near East, then nothing will. The fact is, no Government could ignore that telegram. And I may tell you, strictly between you and me—even Kendrick doesn't know it—I practically *arranged* for a question to be put.

Francis [*raising his eyebrows*]. Really, you can do that sort of thing, eh?

Sir C. Can I do it! Ah, ah!

Francis. Well, I read both the *Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* this morning, and I hadn't the least idea that there was any war scare at all. Everything seemed calm. But now I've looked

at your *Mercury* and your *Courier*, I feel as if the world was tumbling about my ears. I see that not merely is Germany mobilising in secret, but the foundations of Westminster Abbey are in a highly dangerous condition, and, according to seven bishops, the sanctity of the English home is gravely threatened by the luxury of London restaurants. Also you give on page seven of the *Mercury*—I think it is—a very large portrait of a boy aged eleven who weighs two hundred pounds.

Sir C. No, the *Courier*.

Francis. It's all the same, except for the difference in colour.

Sir C. We paid five pounds for that photograph.

Francis. Well, as you say here, it's amazing. I've counted the word "amazing" twenty-three times [*glancing at papers*]. "Whirlwinds of oratory. Bryan speaks ten million words. Amazing figures." "Gold despised by burglars. Amazing haul of diamonds." "Colonel as co-respondent. Amazing letters." "Child-cruelty in a vicarage. Amazing allegations." "Strange scene in a West-End flat. Amazing pranks." "Sudden crisis in Wall Street. Amazing rush." "Kidnapped at midnight. Amazing adventure." "The unwritten law. Husband's amazing coolness." "The fresh-egg industry. Amazing revelations." And so on, to say nothing of Germany. Do you keep it up to that pitch every day?

Sir C. [*not altogether pleased*]. They like it.

Francis. You ought to serve a liqueur brandy with every copy of these papers.

Sir C. Of course, superior people may laugh —but that's what the public wants. I've proved it.

Francis. I'll only say this, Charlie : if that's what the public wants — how clever you were to find it out! I should *never* have thought of it!

Sir C. [*rising and taking up the "Mercury" which Francis has dropped on the floor*]. See here, my boy, you think yourself devilish funny, but look at that front-page ad. Look at it!

Francis [*reading*]. "Uric acid. . . . Life's misery. . . . All chemists. . . . A shilling and a halfpenny." Well? What about it?

Sir C. Nothing. Only we get three hundred pounds for that ad.—one insertion. I'm a business man, and that's what I call business. Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

Francis. I suppose the *Mercury* must appeal specially to the uric acid classes.

Sir C. [*sitting down to dictaphone*]. You may laugh — you may laugh! [*Into dictaphone.*] Mr Ricketts. Macquoid has ceased to be the dramatic critic of *M. and W.* Before definitely making another appointment you might submit names to me. We want something superior, of course. I notice a number of split infinitives in this week's issue. They are out of place in a high-class illustrated. Watch this.

Francis. I say, Charlie.

Sir C. Well?

Francis. What do you say to giving *me* a trial as dramatic critic of *Men and Women*?

Sir C. [*after a pause*]. Can you write?

Francis. Can *you*?

Sir C. [*taken aback and recovering himself*]. Writing is no part of my job. . . . [*Reflectively*]. But I suppose you *can* write. In fact [*as if studying him*], you ought to be able to turn out something pretty smart. You might even be a "find" in journalism.

Francis. There's no knowing. Anyhow, one could try. You may take it from me I can write. I've got an idea that the English theatre must be a great joke.

Sir C. I never go myself. But they say it's a most frantic bore.

Francis. Yes. That's what I meant. I gather that on the whole it must be frantic enough to be worth studying. By the way, I went to a *matinée* at the Prince's Theatre yesterday.

Sir C. Sort of freak theatre, isn't it? Queer?

Francis. It's one of the most artistic shows I ever saw in my life.

Sir C. [*seriously*]. Artistic. Yes, I was told it was queer.

Francis. Who d'ye think I saw there—on the stage! Little Emily Nixon—you know, from Bursley.

Sir C. What? Sister of Abraham Nixon?

Francis. Yes. Don't you remember when we used to go to Nixon's on Saturday nights? She

would be about five then. Don't you remember she used to call you "Tarlie"?

Sir C. Oh! That child! Nice kid, she used to be.

Francis. Nice! She's delightful. I went round to the stage-door after, and took her out to tea. She's a widow. Hasn't a friend in the world, and must be deuced hard up, I should think. But she's charming. And as clever as they make 'em.

Sir C. What's she doing on the stage?

Francis. Oh! St John took her on. She reads plays for him.

Sir C. St John? Who's St John?

Francis. He's the man that's running the Prince's Theatre. *There's* an artist if you like. . . . In spite of weak acting, the way that chap got what they call the Celtic glamour over the footlights was amazing!—[*laughing at himself, half aside*]. Yes, "amazing," since I'm in the *Mercury* building. By the way, she's coming to see you this afternoon.

Sir C. Who? Emily Nixon? But——

Francis. Now don't be a martyr. It's like this. She's been wanting to come and see you for some time. But she thought it would be no use—she'd heard so much about your being invisible.

Sir C. What does she want to see me for?

Francis. Some business, I suppose. I told her that of course you'd see her—like a shot. Or any one from Bursley. She asked when. So I said I should be here this afternoon and she'd

better come then, and I'd arrange it. You might send word downstairs that when she comes she's to be shown up here at once.

Sir C. [*looking at him*]. No, *you*'ve not altered. Dispose of me, my boy. I am yours. The entire staff is yours. Your wish is law. [*Into dictaphone.*] Mr Ricketts. Later. Dramatic critic of *M. and W.* I have appointed Mr Francis Worgan, 11 Hamilton Place.

Francis. 11 Hamilton Place? I'm at the Golden Cross Hotel.

Sir C. You must leave it then, and come to my flat. I want you to see my flat. Look here, about screw?

Francis. Oh! that doesn't matter.

Sir C. [*into dictaphone*]. Salary, fifteen pounds a month. [*To Francis.*] That's quite fair. You aren't a Macquoid yet. [*Enter Page-boy with letters to sign, on a salver.*]

Sir C. [*taking letters, to Boy*]. Tell the Sergeant that if—— [*To Francis.*] What name does she go by, Frank?

Francis. Her husband was Sam Vernon. Mrs Vernon.

Sir C. [*to Boy*]. Tell the Sergeant that if a Mrs Vernon calls to see me she is to be shown up at once. [*Exit Page-boy.*] Just let me sign these letters. [*Begins to sign them. Re-enter Page-boy.*] Hello! Oh! it's the tape. Give it to that gentleman. Look at it, Frank. [*Francis takes the slips from the Boy. Exit Boy. Sir Charles continues to sign letters.*]

Francis [*after looking at the slips*]. The Foreign Secretary seems to have guessed your ideal pretty closely.

Sir C. What do you mean ?

Francis. Only instead of the boy of twelve he said the errand-boy.

Sir C. What on earth——

Francis [*reading*]. "In reply Foreign Secretary said no particle of truth in statements of newspaper in question. Our relations with Germany perfectly harmonious. Every one ought to be aware that, after Hong-Kong, Constantinople was the worst manufactory of false news in the world. Every one ought also to be aware that journal referred to was written by errand-boys for errand-boys. Cheers ! "

Sir C. [*rising*]. Give it here. [*Takes slip, reads it, and drops it on desk ; then goes up to the disk-signal and changes it from red to green, then comes slowly down stage. With a sudden furious outburst.*] The cursed swine !

Francis [*tranquilly*]. But you said yourself——

Sir C. [*savagely*]. Oh ! go to hell !

Francis [*tranquilly*]. Very well ! Very well ! Who is the Foreign Secretary, by the way ?

Sir C. Who is he ? Lord Henry Godwin !

Francis. Oh, yes. Wrote a book on Dryden.

Sir C. I'd Dryden him if I had him here ! [*still savagely*]. If I had him here I'd——! Whenever he meets me you'd think butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. When his idiotic daughter was married to that braying ass of a duke, he

wrote me to say how *pleasea* she had been with the *Mercury's* special description of the wedding.

Francis. Wrote to you, did he ?

Sir C. No mention of errand-boys then !

Francis. Where do you meet him ?

Sir C. Where do I meet him ! At the Club. The Whitehall.

Francis. Do you belong to the Whitehall ?

Sir C. Considering that I was specially elected by the Committee under Rule 9, I should say I did ! Errand-boys ! I sent Teddy Marriott specially out to Constantinople. I suppose nobody will deny he's the showiest of the whole gang of specials. Do you know what I pay him ? Two thousand a year, all his expenses, and a pension of five hundred a year to his widow if he's killed on duty. What price that ? Not much errand-boy about that ! Look at his copy. Is it readable, or isn't it ?

Francis. But after all, supposing what he says isn't true ?

Sir C. Isn't true ! Nobody ever said it was ! *Look* at the thing !

Francis [*looking at paper*]. Well ! [*Reads.*] "England and her enemy. Grave situation. Is the Government asleep ?" All across two columns.

Sir C. Yes, yes. But what does he say at the end ? [*looking over Francis's shoulder*]. "The above facts, which I have no wish to unduly emphasise, and which I give with due reserve, are the staple of current conversation in certain circles

here, and I should be failing in my duty if I did not bring them to the attention of the British public."

Francis. Why didn't he begin by saying that?

Sir C. Oh, rot! You don't know what journalism is. He said it, and that's enough. We've got to give all the news there is going about, and we've got to sell the paper. And by God we do sell it! We spend money like water, and we have the largest circulation in the country. We please the largest public. We pay the highest prices. We make the largest profits. You may or may not like the paper, but nine hundred thousand of Lord Henry Godwin's esteemed fellow-citizens like it. And it's a national institution, let me tell you. It's a national institution! The swine might just as well say at once that the British nation is a nation of errand-boys.

Francis. You may bet he does do, in private.

Sir C. Let him say it in public, then! He daren't. None of 'em dare. I'm the only one that makes no pretences about the British nation. I know what they want, and I give it 'em. And what then? Am I to be insulted? Are they to be insulted? What's the matter with the British nation, anyhow? From the way some of you superior people talk, one might think the British nation ought to be thankful it's alive.

Francis. But——

Sir C. [*carried away*]. I'm told I'm unscrupulous because I "fan the war fever," as it's called, so as to send up my circulation. I'm told I want a

war. Damned nonsense! Nothing but damned nonsense! All I want is for the public to have what *it* wants. It's the public that would like a war, not me. The public enjoys the mere thought of a war. Proof: my circulations. I'm told I pander to the passions of the public. Call it that, if you like. It's what everybody is *trying* to do. Only I succeed. . . . Mind you, I *don't* call it that. I call it supplying a legitimate demand. When you've been to the barber to be shaved, do you round on him for pandering to your passions? You superior people make me sick! Sick! Errand-boys, indeed! Cheers! There's a lot of chaps in the House that would like to be errand-boys of my sort. Cheers, eh! I could have scores of the swine to lick my boots clean every morning if I wanted! Scores! I don't make out to be anything except a business man, but that's no reason why I should stand the infernal insolence of a pack of preposterous hypocrites.

Francis. But——

Sir C. If I couldn't organise some of their departments better than they do, I'd go out and sell my own papers in the Strand! Let 'em come here, let 'em see my counting-house, and my composing-rooms, and my special trains—I'd show 'em.

Francis. But——

Sir C. And I'll tell you another thing. [*Francis gets up and approaches the door.*] Where are you going to?

Francis. I'm going to hell. I'll come back later, after the monologue.

Sir C. Hold on! What were you going to say?

Francis. I was merely going to ask why, if you're only a business man, you should worry yourself about these superior people. Why not leave them alone? You mentioned flannel; or was it soap? Supposing they do accuse you of having persuaded nine hundred thousand errand-boys to buy soap—dash it, you ought to take it as a compliment! You aren't logical.

Sir C. Yes, I am. Let them leave me alone, and I'll leave them alone. But they won't. And it's getting worse. That's the point. It's getting worse.

Francis [*after a pause*]. This is really very interesting.

Sir C. [*snorting offended*]. Is it? Thanks!

Francis. Now look here, Charlie. Of course we're strangers, but still I'm your brother. Don't be an ass. When I say that this is really very interesting, I mean that it *is*. I'm not laughing at you. My attitude to you—and to everybody, as far as that goes—is entirely sympathetic. Because after all we're all in the same boat.

Sir C. All in the same boat? How in the same boat?

Francis. Well, on the same planet. Always getting in each other's way. And death staring all of us in the face! You keep on talking about superior people. There aren't any.

Sir C. There's a lot that think they are.

Francis. And if there are! They can't do you any harm. So why shout? What do you want?

Sir C. I want to give them beans.

Francis. Well, from what I know of you, I would have been ready to wager that if you wanted to give them beans, beans they would instantly get. Now as regards this Godwin person, for example. What's to prevent you from conferring upon him the gift of beans in the presence of your morning audience of nine hundred thousand, and your afternoon audience of I don't know how many? You've got paper, ink, printing-presses, special trains, writers——

Sir C. That's just where you're wrong. I haven't got a writer in the place that can do what I want doing.

Francis. Didn't you mention some one named Smythe as being very wonderful?

Sir C. Yes, he's the chief of the editorial staff of the *Mercury*. But he couldn't do this. You don't understand. He could give Lord Henry beans for the benefit of our public, and he will! But he couldn't persuade Lord Henry that the swine had *got* beans. He couldn't *do* it. It's a different sort of thing that's needed—not *our* snap, something else. Smythe doesn't know enough.

Francis. Well, why don't you go out and get some one who does?

Sir C. Can't. I've tried. I've had several of you

superior people in this shop, and at fancy salaries too ; but it doesn't work. Either they lose their own snap because they think they must imitate ours, or they come down with stuff that nobody else in the blessed building can make head or tail of, and that would ruin the paper in a fortnight. . . . [*In a different tone.*] How do I *strike* you ?—straight, now.

Francis. How do you strike me ?

Sir C. Yes. As a man. Am I a born fool, or something just a bit out of the common in the way of ability ?

Francis. Well, it's quite impossible to believe that a man is a genius if you've been to school with him, or even known his father. But I don't mind telling you, in the most unbrotherly way, that if I were meeting you now for the first time, I should say you were something in the nature of a genius—a peculiar kind, of course—but still——

Sir C. [*quickly*]. Well, let me tell you this—somehow your intellectual, your superior people won't have anything to do with me—anything serious, that is ! There seems to be a sort of boycott among 'em against me ! I don't think I have an acquaintance that I don't despise, and I haven't got any pals at all. Mind you, I've never said as much before to any one. I can put it in a nutshell. It's like this. Supposing some people are talking about Swinburne, or theosophy, or social reform, or any of those things, and I come along—well, they immediately change the conversation and begin about motor-cars !

Francis. But do you really care about Swinburne—and those things ?

Sir C. I don't know. I've never tried. But that's not the point. The point is that I'm just as good as they are, and I don't like their attitude.

Francis. There's only one thing for you to do, my boy—get married.

Sir C. [*continuing his train of thought*]. I object to being left out in the cold. They've no right to do it.

Francis [*repeating his own tone*]. There's only one thing for you to do, my boy—get married.

Sir C. [*quietly*]. I know.

Francis. Some nice, charming, intellectual woman. You could have an A1 house—first class, but not stiff. Tip-top dinners, without a lot of silly ceremony. A big drawing-room, and a little one opening off it where they could talk to her—you know the sort of thing. You'd soon see how she'd rope 'em in for you. It would really be very interesting to watch. Once get the right sort of woman——!

Sir C. Exactly. But you rattle on as if these nice, charming, intellectual women were sitting about all over the place waiting for me. They aren't. I've never *seen* one that would do.

Francis. Well, you won't get where you want to be without a woman. So you'd better set to and find one.

Sir C. Where ?

Francis. I don't know. . . . Who's Lady Calder, for instance ?

Sir C. Lady Calder? Oh! she wouldn't wait to be asked twice.

Francis. What age?

Sir C. Oh! younger than me.

Francis. Much?

Sir C. No! Besides—well, she's a nice woman, but there's too much of the county family touch about her. Sporting, you see. The late Calder lived for nothing but the abolition of wire fences. Before I knew where I was I should be let in for a steam yacht. She's a widow, of course, and that's in her favour [*hesitatingly*].

Francis. Is she intellectual?

Sir C. She would be if I wanted her to be [*half sheepishly*].

Francis. That's no good, no good at all! [*With a sudden outburst of discovery.*] I know who you ought to marry.

Sir C. Who?

Francis. Emily Vernon.

Sir C. Me marry an actress! No, thanks!

Francis. She isn't an actress.

Sir C. You said she was.

Francis. No, I said she was on the stage. She can't act for nuts. But she's the very woman for you. Pretty; and awfully decent. Oh! and she can talk, my boy, she can talk. And she knows what she's talking about. Intellectual, eh? I bet she could wipe the floor with some of these women novelists.

Sir C. And I suppose she hasn't a cent.

Francis. What does that matter?

Sir C. Not a bit.

Francis. You'd never guess she was hard up, to look at her. She'd run a big house for you, and be even with the best of them. And then she comes from Bursley. She's our *sort.*

Sir C. Go on! Go on! I shall be married to her in a minute.

Francis. No, but really!

Sir C. What's she coming here for, to-day, by the way?

Francis. I gathered that it was a question of—— [*Enter Page-boy.*]

Page-boy. Mrs Vernon.

Sir C. [*after a pause*]. Show her in! [*Enter Emily Vernon. Exit Page-boy.*]

Francis [*approaching her*]. Well, Emily. I'm here, you see. We were just talking about you. [*Shakes hands.*]

Emily. Arithmetic, I suppose?

Francis. Arithmetic?

Emily. Adding up my age. [*Taking Sir Charles's hand.*] So it's you? Exactly the same!

Sir C. Really?

Emily. Yes. I'm quite relieved. I expected something majestic and terrible, something like a battleship. I did, truly. Now, what am I to call you?

Sir C. What you used to call me.

Emily. Charlie?

Francis. No, you always called him Tarlie.

Emily. I'm sure I never did. Every one used to say that I talked just like a little woman. The

fact is, I was born at the wrong end, and I'm getting more childish every day. I say, Charlie, I do wish I'd known a little earlier that you weren't a battleship. I'd worked myself up into a fine state of nervousness.

Sir C. You don't seem nervous.

Emily. No. But I am. At least, I was. When I'm amusing and clever, that's a sure sign I'm very nervous. People say, "How bright she is!" And all the time I'm shivering with fright. When I'm quite at my ease I become quite dull. Natural idleness, I expect.

Sir C. Well, suppose we sit down? [*They sit.*]

Emily. How nice it is of you to see me like this! Now, there was another illusion. I always thought you were most frightfully difficult to see.

Sir C. Not to any one from the Five Towns, and especially from Bursley.

Francis. Don't you believe it! I assure you that I only got at him this afternoon over the dead bodies of a soldier and five office-boys.

Emily [*to Francis*]. Yes, I guessed it was you who had made straight the pathway. [*To Sir C.*] Francis and I got rather intimate yesterday—didn't we, Francis?—over the Yeats play.

Francis. Very! Very! But the butter-scotch helped, you know.

Emily. I never asked you how you thought I said my lines, and you never told me.

Francis. Oh, well. I daresay you've seen what Macquoid said of the first performance. He said

you were as heaven made you! . . . So you must have been very fine.

Emily. How horrid he is! He really is horrid! . . . I suppose I oughtn't to say that to you, Charlie, as he's on one of your papers now. Of course I know he's generally right. That's what makes it so annoying.

Sir C. Say anything you choose. He's no longer on our staff.

Emily. You've dismissed him?

Sir C. It comes to that.

Emily. Oh! Rejoicing in Zion! A sigh of relief will run through the whole profession. And who's going to take his place?

Francis. Me, madam.

Emily. Well, it's just like a fairy-tale. But I wonder if our young and untried friendship will stand the awful strain.

Francis. I've decided what I shall do in regard to you. If I can't honestly praise you, I sha'n't mention you at all.

Emily. Charlie, let me beg you to dispense with his services at once. He'll be more disliked even than Macquoid. [*To Francis.*] Do you know what we're going to produce next—if we can keep open? Ford's *Broken Heart.*

Francis [*recites*].

> "Crowns may flourish and decay;
> Beauties shine, but fade away;
> Youth may revel, yet it must
> Lie down in a bed of dust."

Emily. Yes, isn't it lovely? Don't you think it's a lovely play, Charlie?

Sir C. Never read it. Ford, did you say? Don't know him. You see, I'm so taken up——

Emily [*sympathetically*]. I know how busy you must be. But if you *could* find time to read *The Broken Heart*, I'm sure you'd enjoy it. Has Francis told you what I've come about?

Francis. I was just beginning to explain when you arrived and interrupted me.

Emily. How clumsy of me! [*composing her features*]. Well, it's like this, Charlie [*laughs*].

Sir C. What's the joke?

Emily. Nothing. Only nervousness! Mere hysterics! I was just thinking how absurd I have been to come here and worry you. Francis, do explain.

Francis [*to Sir Charles*]. The creature is after money.

Emily [*with a cry of protest*]. You appalling and unprincipled bungler! [*To Charlie.*] It's like this. Our chief is a very great man.

Sir C. St John—is it? [*Turns to Francis as if for confirmation.*]

Emily. Yes. We always call him the Chief. He's a most fearful brute. He stamps on us and curses us, and pays us miserably, miserably, and we all adore him, and nobody knows why. He simply cares about nothing but his theatre; and of course, for producing a play, there's only him. But as a man of business—well, it would be no use trying to describe what he is as a man of

business ; an infant in arms could give him lessons in business through the post. Now only a fortnight ago, when the Chancellor of Oxford University made that appeal for funds, what do you think the Chief did ? He sent twenty pounds, just because he rowed once in the Boat-race. And he simply hadn't got twenty pounds.

Sir C. Clever chap !

Emily. Wasn't it splendid of him ? The Prince's might be a success if somebody with money would come in and look after the business side, and never let the Chief see a cheque-book.

Sir C. Isn't it a success ? I thought I saw an advertisement in the *Mercury* to-day that the new *matinées* were very successful.

Emily. Artistically, yes. Artistically, they're a record. But the fact has escaped the public. We are not at the moment what you'd call turning money away. Most of the notices were very bad —of course.

Sir C. Were they ? Was the *Mercury* bad ? I forget.

Emily. No, I fancy it was rather nice.

Sir C. They say a good notice in the *Mercury* will keep any theatre open for at least a month.

Emily. Personally, I love the *Mercury.* It's so exciting. Like bread and jam, without the bread. To me it's a sort of delicious children's paper——

Francis [*throwing his head back*]. There you are again, Charles.

Emily [*half-laughing*]. I don't know what you're

laughing at. I meant that for a compliment, Charlie. [*Sir Charles nods good-humouredly.*] Its domestic hints are splendid. But somehow the people who would be likely to come to the Prince's don't seem to read the *Mercury*—at any rate not for its dramatic criticism. The Prince's is a very special theatre, you see.

Sir C. Superior, you mean? Intellectual?

Emily [*half-mocking*]. Oh, yes! It's almost like a church.

Sir C. And this Chief of yours wants some one to put money into this church?

Emily. Yes. We're all of us trying to find capital, except him. You see, it's our livelihood. If the theatre were to close, where should I be, for instance? [*Laughs.*] I just happened to think of you, Charlie. The idea ran through my mind—like a mouse.

Sir C. How much would be needed?

Emily. Oh! I don't know. A thousand.

Francis. You mean five thousand.

Emily. Didn't I say five? I quite meant to. But my lips went wrong all by themselves.

Sir C. [*shortly*]. Oh! [*A pause.*]

Emily. Of course. Now that I'm here I can see how absurd it is. I said the Prince's might be a success—I mean financially—but honestly I don't believe it ever would. It's too good. And the Chief is too much of a genius. . . . Oh! whenever I think of him sending twenty pounds to Oxford like that, I wonder why millionaires can't attend to those great lumbering University

things, instead of men like St John. The thought of that twenty pounds always makes me perfectly furious. But the Chief's incurable.

Sir C. Well, I don't mind putting five thousand into the thing.

Emily. Really? But—but—supposing you lost it?

Sir C. Well, I don't mind losing it. Besides, I've never lost any money yet.

Francis. A new sensation for him!

Sir C. [*ignoring Francis's remark*]. If St John would let me *run* him a bit.

Emily [*with a solemn air*]. Charlie, do you mean to say that you'll put five thousand pounds into the Prince's Theatre, just on the strength of me coming here and telling you about it?

Sir C. Yes.

Emily. When?

Sir C. Now.

Emily. I never heard of such goings-on. I hadn't the slightest idea it was so easy as that to get five thousand pounds.

Sir C. It isn't, usually. But this is a special case. I should like to help along a really superior —er—intellectual——

Emily [*heartily*]. It *is* an honour, isn't it, after all? But people with money never seem to see that. . . . [*Pinches herself.*] Yes, I'm awake. Can I go and tell the Chief, now, from you, that you're ready to——

Sir C. You can telephone to him this instant, if you like [*pointing to telephone*].

Emily. No, that won't do.

Sir C. Why not ?

Emily. They cut off the theatre telephone this morning [*a brief sobbing catch in her voice*]. St John would have had to close on Saturday if something hadn't turned up. I—I don't know what *I* should have done. I've been at the end of my tether once before. [*Francis rises, alarmed by her symptoms.*] I'm all right. I'm all right. [*Laughs.*]

Sir C. Shall I order up some tea ?

Emily. No, no. I must go and tell him. I'm quite all right. I was only thinking how awkward it is to alter one's old frocks to this high-waisted Directoire style.

Sir C. [*lamely*]. Why ?

Emily. Because you can always shorten a skirt, but how are you to lengthen it ? Well, I must go and tell him.

Francis. So much hurry as all that ?

Emily. Let me go.

Sir C. But look here. When shall we see you again ?

Francis. Yes, when shall we——

Emily. Can I bring St John to-morrow morning ?

Sir C. Certainly.

Emily. What time ?

Sir C. Any time.

Emily. Eleven o'clock ?

Sir C. All right. [*Emily shakes hands with Sir Charles, appears to be about to speak, but is silent; then shakes hands quickly with Francis, and exit*

quickly, under emotion. The men look at each other. Pause.]

Francis. Well! Have a cigarette?

Sir C. [*moved*]. No, thanks. She must have been through a thing or two, by God!

Francis. Knocks you about a bit, doesn't it—when it comes out sudden like that? I hadn't a notion. What do you think of her? All right, isn't she?

Sir C. [*nods, after a pause*]. She gave me another idea.

Francis. Oh? [*Lights a cigarette.*]

Sir C. Yes. I'm damned if I don't give a hundred thousand pounds to Oxford University. Never occurred to me! That—and running the Prince's Theatre——

Francis. But you never went to Oxford.

Sir C. Do you think they'll make that an excuse for refusing it?

[*Curtain.*]

ACT II

NOTES ON CHARACTERS IN THIS ACT

Holt St John.—Theatrical manager. A man of the finest artistic taste. Otherwise a brute, especially in manner. A biggish man. He cares for nothing and nobody when his artistic ideas are at stake. Occasionally there is something wistful in his voice. Age about 50.

Henry Cleland.—Stage-manager. A little, obsequious man, with sharp features. A time-server, and capable of duplicity. Profound admirer of his wife. Age 46.

Mrs Cleland (Henrietta Blackwood).—A fine actress. Too good for the public. Wearing out after a long and arduous career; but she can still play virgins. Disillusioned, naturally. Isn't quite sure whether she has ever been a genuine "star" or not, in the eyes of the public. Kind-hearted. Great admiration for St John. Age unknown.

Same scene. Time: Monday morning. (*Disk, blue.*)
Sir Charles is alone, dictating into the dictaphone.

Sir C. I must have a reply by return or it is off. Yours faithfully. Lord Rugby. My dear Rugby, All my excuses for not coming round last night to the smoker. I was prevented by the most urgent business. You never know in my trade what may turn up. See you, I suppose, at the Committee— [*Enter Kendrick and Emily Vernon, R.*]

Sir C. [*finishing quickly*]—meeting of the A.C. next Thursday. Yours sincerely. [*He jumps up.*]

Kendrick. I met Mrs Vernon in the street and piloted her up.

Sir C. [*nervous, shaking hands with Emily*]. Good morning. Have this chair, will you?

Emily [*questioningly*]. No worse for the adventure?

Sir C. [*smiles awkwardly*]. Oh, no!

Kendrick [*to Sir Charles*]. I say—have you had the figures of the *Sunday Morning News*?

Sir C. No.

Kendrick. You were right about that "Crimes of Passion" series, by Jove! Thirty-six thousand up! Twenty-five thousand up last week! What about it, eh? I came across a ripping one yesterday. The Halifax murder, in 1886; began with a ripping adultery. I just wanted to ask you——

Sir C. [*slightly disturbed*]. All right! All right! I've got a meeting on here at twelve. Half a moment! [*Hastens to door, L., and opens it.*] I say, Frank. Oh! you *are* there! Come and look after Mrs Vernon. [*To Emily.*] Excuse me two seconds, will you? Now, Kendrick! [*Exeunt Sir Charles and Kendrick, R. Enter Francis taking off his gloves.*]

Francis. Well, Emily. [*They shake hands.*]

Emily. You seem to be quite installed here.

Francis. I'm the darling of the place. My dramatic criticism is said to be snappy without being vicious. And now I've been appointed head of the obituary department, at my own request. Add this to my chairmanship of the Prince's Theatre, Limited——

Emily. Why the obituary department?

Francis. It seemed to give the widest scope for humour. And you know, humour is just what this place is short of.

Emily. I thought you published lots of comic papers.

Francis. Have you ever *seen* one of our comic papers ?

Emily. No.

Francis. Well, have a look at one. . . . No, that's hardly friendly. Don't have a look at one.

Emily. And is that your room now ? [*indicating door, L.*].

Francis. That is my room. I'm on the very steps of the throne.

Emily. I should never have guessed that you would settle down here.

Francis [*mock-confidentially, in a lower voice*]. I sha'n't. My only rule is never to settle down. But as an amateur of human nature I couldn't miss such a unique opportunity of studying the English mind as fed by the Worgan Press, and the English ideal as mirrored in the British Theatre. Could I ? I shall probably give myself a year of this excitement. More would not be good for me. I suppose you're here for the meeting ?

Emily. Yes. It seems it isn't exactly a formal meeting.

Francis. Merely a chat, I'm told. Instead of being chairman I shall be just a plain person, like you or Charlie or the Chief.

Emily [*quietly*]. Charlie was talking to me about it yesterday.

Francis [*slightly lifting his eyebrows*]. Oh ! Sunday !

Emily [*looking away from Francis*]. He called to see me.

Francis. Where?

Emily. The natural place. My rooms. Where should you have called if you'd wanted to see me? . . . However, I'll be candid with you. I was just as startled as you are—more, even!

Francis. I'm—why should you be startled? Unless, of course, it's a nunnery that you inhabit.

Emily. Put yourself in the position of the poor but virtuous actress spending a pleasant Sunday afternoon washing imitation lace—when in walks Sir Charles Worgan, millionaire.

Francis. But, after all, Charlie is only Charlie.

Emily. That's where you're wrong. He's a good deal more than Charlie. So I concealed the lace.

Francis. Did he come in the motor?

Emily. He came on his feet. Why?

Francis. Nothing. Only he started out in the motor.

Emily. I daresay it broke down.

Francis. And he came back in it.

Emily [*impatiently*]. Indeed! Well, there's *another* mystery of a motor-car, that's all! The point is that he called to consult me.

Francis. What about?

Emily. About the next production at the Prince's. You see, I have always read plays for the Chief. That's really how the Chief came to take me on, and I suppose that's why they gave me a share in the company and called me a director. He seemed to be quite disturbed.

Francis. Who? Charlie?

Emily. Yes. He said he understood that the next production was to be *The Merchant of Venice.*

Francis. So it was.

Emily. The Chief appears to be changing his mind. Just recently he's read *The Lion's Share*—that Welsh piece by Lloyd Morgan.

Francis. Stage Society?

Emily. Yes. He went to one of the rehearsals, and he's tremendously keen on it.

Francis. Really! [*Taking tickets and programme from his pocket.*] Yes. That's it. I'm going to see it this afternoon. They've sent me a couple of tickets. Care to come?

Emily. You needn't be so stuck up with your two tickets. I went last night.

Francis. Why, you informed me not long since that it was impossible to get tickets for Sunday night performances of the Stage Society. You said even duchesses were glad to crowd into the gallery, and critics hadn't a dog's chance.

Emily. Charles had got tickets somehow. He left a stall for me and asked me if I'd go. He told me he might be there himself, but he wasn't sure.

Francis. And was he?

Emily. Yes. [*With a trace of self-consciousness, after a pause.*] He had the next stall to mine.

Francis [*nodding his head*]. Extraordinary how shy that youth is about being intellectual! He told *me* he was going to a smoking-concert. Was it a success—the Welsh thing?

Emily. Oh, yes. But that's nothing. Anything would be a success in London on Sunday night. People are so *grateful.*

Francis. Then you didn't like it?

Emily. On the contrary. I adored it.

Francis. Did Charlie?

Emily [*shakes her head; a little pause*]. He didn't *see* it.

Francis. I suppose it's one of those disagreeable plays, as we say in the *Mercury*—the disastrous effect of French influence on the Nonconformist mind.

Emily. It was so real that I could have——

Francis. You confirm my worst suspicions.

Emily [*smiling*]. *You're* bound to enjoy it.

Francis. But Charlie didn't?

Emily. And yet, you know, he *is* clever—don't you think so? Just look at what he's done with the Prince's! Don't you think he's frightfully clever?

Francis. Clever isn't the word.

Emily. What is the word?

Francis. There isn't a word. I've lived with Charlie now for four months, and I've looked carefully through the dictionary, and I've satisfied myself that there isn't a word. Charlie baffles.

Emily. Yes, that's why he's so fascinating. I was only thinking, as I walked back last night—— [*stopping; in a different voice*]. I may as well tell you we walked back together after the theatre to my square. It was such a lovely night.

Francis. It was. [*Enter Page-boy with St John.*]

Page-boy. Mr St John. [*Exit.*]

Francis [*rising*]. Good morning, St John. How are you ?

St John. Mondayish. [*To Emily.*] Hello ! What are you doing here ?

Emily [*shaking hands with him*]. Good morning, Chief. Sir Charles asked me to come.

St John [*displeased*]. Oh ! [*Enter Sir Charles, R., quickly.*]

Sir C. Morning, St John [*shakes hands*]. Thanks for being so prompt.

St John. I thought you wanted to have a chat with *me* ?

Sir C. So I do. But it occurred to me afterwards there couldn't be any harm in asking all the other directors. [*He takes record out of dictaphone.*]

St John. Do you mean to say Cleland and his wife are coming ?

Sir C. Well, my dear St John, surely your stage-manager and your leading lady ought to be consulted, if any one ought, especially as they're directors.

St John. Is this a board meeting, or isn't it ? If it is, why hasn't it been properly summoned ? I don't set up as a cast-iron devotee of business rules, but——

Sir C. Not strictly a board meeting.

Francis. Rather, a meeting of the board. [*To Sir Charles.*] There's no "chair," I take it ?

Sir C. No, no ; quite unnecessary. Now, St John, I just want to state a few things [*looking at*

clock]. Well, of course if the Clelands are late, we can't help it. Anyhow—[*pause, as if making up his mind*] I've been going into the accounts, and it may be said that we've turned the corner—but not very far. There's been a profit of about a hundred pounds on the last three months—since the company was definitely formed. A hundred pounds in three months is not much. It will just pay the interest on the debentures. Of course it would have been larger but for the *matinées* of *The Broken Heart*. On the other hand, it would have been smaller—in fact there would have been a loss—if we had paid proper salaries. The directors get nothing, as directors. Mr Cleland and Miss Henrietta Blackwood accept rather nominal salaries, partly because they're together, but no doubt partly on account of Mrs Cleland's —er—advancing age ; the other members of the troupe are equally ill-paid. As for you, St John, your remuneration as manager is—well, inadequate.

St John. Don't you worry about that. You can put it that what I receive is for playing a small part now and then. For my producing, there's no question of adequate remuneration. Couldn't be ! Frohman himself couldn't remunerate me adequately for my producing ! I'm the greatest producer on earth. Every one knows that.

Sir C. Well, there it is ! All I want to point out is that we are at a critical period in our career. We mustn't be too satisfied with ourselves. We must consolidate our position. The future

depends on what we do now. Our present bill will probably run another couple of months.

St John. It may, or it mayn't. I never like to run a piece out. I want to have something else ready in three weeks, and I can do it.

Sir C. That's just what I'm anxious to discuss. Do you really mean that you can do a Shakespearean production in three weeks ?

St John. I've decided against *The Merchant of Venice.* I thought you understood that. I'm going to do *The Lion's Share.* I saw it last night, and I practically arranged with the author—Lloyd Morgan, or Morgan Lloyd, or whatever his name is. It's a great thing. Let everybody take notice of what I say ! It's a great thing !

Sir C. I also saw it last night. It may or may not be a great thing—I don't pretend to be a judge——

St John. That's all right, then. I do.

Sir C. But I pretend to be a judge of what will succeed. And I don't think *The Lion's Share* would succeed. I'm quite sure it isn't a certainty.

St John. It's no part of my scheme to produce certainties. As far as that goes, I've never met one. More money has been lost on certainties than would pay off the bally National Debt. My scheme is to produce masterpieces.

Sir C. And if the public won't come to see them ?

St John. So much the worse for the public ! The loss is theirs !

Sir C. It seems to me the loss will also be ours.

Francis [*soothingly*]. St John means that the public and ourselves will share the loss. But whereas we shall know exactly how much we have lost, the public will be under the disadvantage of never guessing that it has lost anything at all.

Sir C. [*in a low tone to Francis*]. Just let me speak, will you ? [*Francis gives a courteous humorous smile of consent.*]

St John. Besides, who says the public won't come ?

Sir C. I do. Another thing—*The Lion's Share* contains no decent part for Miss Blackwood.

St John. I can't help that. At my theatre the company has got to fit the play. Let the old girl have a rest. God knows she's been working like a camel. [*Enter Page-boy with Mr and Mrs Cleland.*]

Sir C. [*to Page-boy*]. Boy ! [*Page-boy comes round to Sir Charles and waits.*]

Mrs C. I do hope we aren't late. The fact is we met my dear old father in the Strand. I hadn't seen him for months, and it gave me quite a turn. How d'ye do, Sir Charles ? [*greeting him*].

Cleland [*who has been shaking hands round; quietly to Sir Charles*]. I got your letter this morning.

Sir C. [*nods*]. Now, Mrs Cleland—have this chair. St John is thinking of producing a play with no part for you. What do you say to that ? [*Hands dictaphone records to Page-boy. Exit Page-boy.*]

Mrs C. [*after shaking hands round and kissing*

Emily]. I know what I should have said twenty years ago. But I often say nowadays that my idea of bliss is a dozen oysters and go to bed comfortably at ten o'clock. So long as you pay my salary, I don't mind. Salaries have been so *very* regular lately, I wouldn't like it disturbed. Would *you*, my dear? [*to Emily*].

Sir C. The question is, how long we should be able to keep on paying salaries with you out of the bill.

Mrs C. Now that's very nice of you, Sir Charles.

Cleland [*rubbing his hands*]. *Lion's Share*, I suppose you're talking about?

Sir C. What's your view of this wonderful piece, Cleland?

Cleland [*askance at St John*]. Well, I only saw the dress-rehearsal. Of course it's clever, undoubtedly clever. It may please the Stage Society; but if you ask me my frank opinion——

St John. Sam's opinion is worth nothing at all, especially if it's frank. When he tries to imitate me it isn't always so bad. I didn't engage Sam as a connoisseur. I engaged him because his wife can *act*——

Mrs C. My old father said to me this morning, "Henrietta," he says, "you and I are the only members of the Blackwood family that can really *act*. I could act a railway engine. And I believe you could, too," he says. Didn't he, Sam? Excuse me, Chief.

St John. And also because he's the only

stage-manager in London who'll do what you tell him without any damned improvements of his own. But as for his views—they are invariably vulgar. Sam would make a fortune if he were let alone.

Cleland. I should. Just give me a chance.

St John. Not much, Sammy! Not if I know it!

Sir C. What is your opinion of *The Lion's Share*, Mrs Cleland?

Mrs C. [*indignant*]. Don't ask me. How should I know? My own nephew's playing in it, but could he get a seat for me for last night? No! I've been before the London public for twenty-six years, but could I get in on my card? No.

Francis. If you'll give me the pleasure of your company this afternoon, Mrs Cleland, I've got a couple of stalls.

Mrs C. Much obliged, Mr Worgan. But if I can't go on Sunday I don't go at all. I'm not proud; but either I'm Henrietta Blackwood or I'm not! At least, that's how I look at it.

Sir C. Mrs Vernon has seen the play——

Mrs C. Congratulations, my dear!

Sir C. But I haven't yet asked her views, formally——

St John. You needn't, Sir Charles. I feel somehow that I can struggle on without 'em.

Sir C. But she was put on the Board simply because she'd always been used to reading plays for you! How often have you said what fine taste she has!

St John. That's true. I value her opinion—when I want it. But in this case my mind is made up. You were sitting together last night, you two! I saw you.

Sir C. That was a mere accident.

St John. Agreed! Accidents will happen. [*Hums an air.*]

Sir C. [*controlling himself*]. As I said before, I don't pretend to be a judge——

St John. As I said before, I *do*. That about settles that, doesn't it?

Sir C. No [*gravely and obstinately*]. Speaking simply as a member of the public, my objections to the piece, if only I could put them properly—of course it's not my line to explain——

St John. Don't let that trouble you. I can explain your objections. You've got three objections. The first is that this play is true to life, the second is that it's original, and the third is that it's beautiful. You're a bold financier, but you're afraid of beauty; you detest originality; and as for truth, it makes you hold your nose. Do you think I don't know all about your confounded objections? I'm turned fifty. I've spent a quarter of a century in trying to make this damned town appreciate beauty, and though I've succeeded once or twice, the broad result is that I can't look my greengrocer in the face. But I wouldn't swop places with you. It would be like being blind and deaf. [*Suddenly to Francis, as to one who understands.*] I wish you'd seen *The Lion's Share*. I know what you'd say!

Sir C. [*quickly*]. Come now, St John, whatever the private opinions of any of us may be, I am quite sure we shall all be agreed that this wonderful play of yours won't please the public. [*Looks at Emily, as if for confirmation.*] It would be bound to be a frost. . . . You yourself——

St John [*springing up*]. Nothing of the kind! Nothing of the kind! No one ever caught me saying that any play on earth would be a frost. No really new thing ever yet succeeded but what all the blessed wiseacres who know the public best swore it would be a rank failure. Let me tell you that in the end you chaps are always wrong. Public taste is continually changing. Is it you chaps who change it? Not much, by God! It's we who change it. But before we can begin to work, we must get past a pack of infernal rotters who say they have their finger on the public pulse. [*More quietly.*] Well, we *do* get past, that's one comfort.

Mrs C. Oh, Chief! How you carry on, to be sure! It's worse than a rehearsal. And this isn't your stage, you know.

Sir C. [*smiling*]. That's all right, that's all right. St John is always enthusiastic. A month ago he was just as enthusiastic for Shakespeare.

St John. Yes, but then I hadn't got my eye on a good modern piece.

Sir C. I suppose you'll admit that *The Lion's Share* is not as good a play as *The Merchant of Venice.* I've been reading *The Merchant of Venice* myself. A most interesting old play! Now

there's beauty, to use your own word, if you like.

St John. Sudden discovery of a hitherto neglected author by the proprietor of the *Daily Mercury.*

Sir C. All this is not argument.

St John. My excellent Sir Charles, any ass of an actor-manager can produce Shakespeare.

Francis. Excuse me, St John, I don't wish to interrupt a duel, but you told me exactly the contrary not long since. You said there wasn't an actor-manager in London who understood Shakespeare enough to make even a decent call-boy in a Shakespearean production.

St John. And I was right. Some day I'll show 'em. But I'm not going to spend my time on Shakespeare when I've got a first-class modern production all waiting. It's the Shakespeares of the future that I'm on.

Sir C. Now seriously, St John—— [*A pause.*]

Cleland. The wife is a really tremendous Portia, Chief. Aren't you, Henrietta ?

Mrs C. He knows. He saw me at the old Novelty in '89.

Sir C. And I was thinking that Jessica was the very part for Mrs Vernon—I hope you won't deny that it's about time Mrs Vernon had a decent show [*half laughing*].

St John [*coldly*]. Since you've mentioned it, I may as well tell you I've decided that Mrs Vernon must leave the Prince's company.

Emily. Chief—you aren't—— [*stops*].

Sir C. [*annoyed*]. Now, what's this? [*General surprise.*]

St John. I'm not satisfied with her work. The truth is, I never was. I was taken by her enthusiasm for a good thing. But what's that got to do with acting?

Emily [*deeply moved*]. You aren't going to throw me over? I've always tried my very best. What do you think I shall do if you throw me over?

St John. I don't know. Whatever you do you oughtn't to act any more. Because it ain't your line. You're simply painful in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and no one knows it better than you.

Mrs C. Don't listen to him, Emily.

St John [*growling*]. You needn't think I'm not sorry for her. But I won't have all my productions messed up for evermore just because I've been unfortunate enough to engage an actress who can't act. I want a fine production, and I mean to have it. I don't care twopence for anything else. I'm not a philanthropist. I'm a brute. Everybody knows that. [*Emily moves away from the others and tries to control herself.*]

Sir C. You're not going to——

St John [*challenging him with a stiff look*]. I'm not going to have any favourites in the company.

Sir C. Favourites?

St John. Yes, favourites. I mean nothing offensive. But I've had this on my mind some time. You began the subject. Now you know!

Sir C. But Mrs Vernon is a director of the company.

St John. Who made her a director of the company? You did; just as you made your brother the nominal chairman. Not that I mind that in the least. She can be a director of forty companies so long as she doesn't act on my stage.

Sir C. Your stage?

St John. My stage.

Sir C. The company's stage.

St John. Damn the company!

Sir C. You can't damn the company. The company saved you when you never expected to be saved. The company put you on your legs, and put the theatre on its legs. The company gave you two thousand pounds' worth of shares for a goodwill that was worth nothing. The company gave shares to Mr Cleland and Miss Blackwood for arrears of salary, and the same to Mrs Vernon. My brother and I bought shares. On all these shares the company will pay good interest, if only a little common-sense is shown. Surely Mrs Vernon has deserved better of you than to be dismissed! Without her——

St John. Without her I shouldn't have had your help.

Sir C. Exactly, since you care to put it that way.

St John. Well, since I care to put it that way, Sir Charles, I don't know that I'm so desperately grateful. What have you done, after all? You

insisted on an orchestra, to keep the audience from thinking. You invented a costume for the programme girls and made a rule that they must be under twenty-five and pretty, and you put up the price of the programmes from twopence to sixpence. You plastered the West End all over with coloured posters that would make a crocodile swoon. And that's about all.

Sir C. I put order into the concern. And I gave you the support of all my journals, including the most powerful daily paper in London.

St John. Thank you for nothing! The most powerful daily paper in London has got me laughed at by all my friends. I'm not likely to forget the morning after the first performance of *The Broken Heart*, when the most powerful daily paper in London talked for three-quarters of a column about the essential, English, breezy, healthy purity of the Elizabethan drama.

Mrs C. I remember they called me Harriet instead of Henrietta.

Francis. A misprint. [*To St John*] It was all a misprint.

Sir C. [*quietly*]. Still, the public comes, now.

St John. Yes, and what a public!

Sir C. There's only one sort of public. It's the sort that pays.

St John. Let it fork it out then, and accept what I choose to give it! I'll choose my plays, and I'll choose my players. I'm sorry for Emily, but I can't help it. So long as I'm the manager, I'll be the manager. I'll keep a free hand.

Sir C. [*threateningly*]. If you wanted to keep a free hand, you ought not to have accepted my money.

St John. Look here, Sir Charles, don't you try to come the millionaire over me. You may be a millionaire in your private capacity, but when you discuss the theatre with me you're simply a man who doesn't know what he's talking about.

Mrs C. Chief, you're losing your temper.

St John. Shut up!

Sir C. You are the manager, but I'm the largest shareholder, and I hold all the debentures. I can always outvote you. I won't consent to Shakespeare being shelved. Shakespeare was your own idea, not mine. Why can't you stick to it? Why do you want to produce a morbid play that *must* fail? You may take it from me, I've got no use for a frost. Every one knows I'm in the Prince's. I don't choose to be associated with failures. And, above all, I won't consent to the dismissal of Mrs Vernon. Is that clear?

St John [*approaching him, very quietly*]. Do you want to get rid of me?

Sir C. No. I only want you to behave reasonably.

St John. Oh! That's all you want, is it? Will you buy me out?

Sir C. Certainly, if you wish it.

St John [*furiously*]. Well, then, do! I resign! See? I resign. You've saved a fine enterprise, and ruined it at the same time. Cleland's your man. Put your two wooden heads together, and

you're bound to make a howling success of the Prince's. Cleland'll carry out your theories for you. Cleland's notion of realism in art is potted primroses on a river's brim. Get at it at once. In six months you'll be playing musical comedy at the Prince's—[*pause*] and "House full" over the portico [*scornfully*]—a thing that's never been seen in my time! . . . I resign.

Sir C. You aren't serious.

St John. Do you take me for a bally clown? [*Solemnly.*] I'm always serious. [*To Mrs Cleland.*] Good-bye, old girl! [*Exit back, with a violent banging of the door.*]

Mrs C. [*with a passionate outburst, rising*]. St John!

Cleland [*to his wife*]. Sit down, and be quiet.

Mrs C. [*half hysterical*]. Loose me! St John! [*She rushes out after him, crying. Noises in the corridor.*]

Sir C. [*to Francis*]. Just go and quieten them, will you? There'll be a regular scene out there in a minute. We can't have the whole building upset.

Francis. That's all very well——

Sir C. [*insisting*]. There's a good fellow. [*Exit Francis.*] I say, Cleland.

Cleland. I'll look after her.

Sir C. [*a little anxiously*]. She won't throw us over?

Cleland [*confidently*]. Leave that to me.

Sir C. [*after a glance at Emily*]. I'll telephone you later in the day with an appointment. I haven't time now.

Cleland. Good ! [*Shakes hands.*] Splendid, Sir Charles. [*Exit.*]

Emily. I must go too [*rising*].

Sir C. Here ! Wait a bit. Sit down half a minute. You can't go like that.

Emily [*sits*]. I don't suppose there ever was another man as rude as the Chief. What a *brute* ! But he's always the same—simply never cares for anything except his own ideas. There's nothing he wouldn't sacrifice for them. Nothing !

Sir C. Well, he'd got *me* to deal with !

Emily. The thing that surprised me most was the way you kept your temper.

Sir C. Oh ! that's nothing ! I can generally keep my temper when I see the other man is losing his. It was only when he began talking about favourites that I nearly let myself go.

Emily. Seeing us together last night at the theatre—that must have made him think we'd been plotting against him.

Sir C. And yet we hadn't, had we ? I don't know even now what you really think about that play.

Emily. The Lion's Share ? I quite agree with you that it wouldn't have a chance with the public.

Sir C. But you think it's a fine play ?

Emily. Why do you think I think that ?

Sir C. Well, from what you said last night.

Emily. I was careful not to say. We both rather kept off it, *I* thought.

Sir C. Then from what you didn't say.

Emily. Yes, I think it's fine.

Sir C. Do you? [*genuinely puzzled*]. And you think Francis'll like it too?

Emily. Yes.

Sir C. Queer! I suppose there must be something in it. I wish you'd explain it to me—I mean what you see in it.

Emily. Oh! I can't explain. It's just a matter of taste.

Sir C. You explained lots of things in *The Merchant of Venice*, anyway.

Emily. Oh, Charlie, I didn't! I only just——

Sir C. Yes, you did. In fact, you made me quite keen on it. That's one reason why I was determined not to let St John throw it over. But if *The Merchant of Venice* were a great success, I wouldn't mind *The Lion's Share* being done at *matinées*.

Emily. That wouldn't satisfy him. He'd never give way. And what's more, he'd never give way about me. [*Thoughtfully.*] He's quite right, you know. I can't act [*smiles*]. I expect it's because I'm too intellectual.

Sir C. Of course you can act.

Emily. How do you know? You've never seen me.

Sir C. I'm sure you can.

Emily. And what's going to happen *now*?

Sir C. Happen? Nothing! The theatre will go on. Do you think I can't run a theatre? I knew there'd be a rumpus. In fact, I brought it on, because things were bound to come to a crisis between St John and me sooner or later, and

sooner is always best. So I came to a clear understanding with Cleland in advance.

Emily. Did you?

Sir C. Yes. I had to know exactly where I stood. And Cleland is a very good man. You'll see. I'll make that theatre hum.

Emily. It was awfully good of you, sticking up for me.

Sir C. Not at all. I'll sign you a contract for three years if you like.

Emily [*nervously*]. Well, of course I'm not in a position to refuse offers of that kind. But really you are awfully kind. I must tell you—I'd no idea you were so good-natured. Most people have got an entirely wrong notion of you. *I* had at the start.

Sir C. How?

Emily. They think you're as hard as nails. And the truth is you're fearfully good-natured.

Sir C. No, I'm not.

Emily. Well, look how you've behaved to me! I can't thank you, you know. I never *could* thank any one for anything—anything serious, that is.

Sir C. [*pleased at this revelation; confidentially*]. That's funny, now! I'm just the same. Whenever I have to thank people I always begin to blush, and I feel awkward.

Emily. I know, I know. [*After a pause.*] And yet, I ought to thank you. This makes twice you've saved me.

Sir C. Saved you? What are you talking about?

Emily. Well, what do you suppose I should have done if you and Francis hadn't been in the affair and St John had had his way? Where should I have been? I've got nothing to fall back on. I've been alone for four years now, and every penny I've spent I've had to earn. And till this year I never made a hundred and twenty pounds in a single year. I wasn't brought up to earn, that's why. I'm very conceited, and if you ask me I think I'm a fairly finished sort of article; but I can't do anything that people *want* doing. You don't know what I've been through. No one knows except me. You don't know what you've saved me from. No! I couldn't have begun that frightful struggle over again, I couldn't have faced it. It's too disgusting, too humiliating —I should have——

Sir C. [*disturbed*]. But look here, Emily——

Emily. Yes, I know! One oughtn't to speak like that. It makes everybody so uncomfortable. Never look back at a danger that's passed! And yet—the first time I saw you here, and I managed to joke about altering frocks—— Never shall I forget my relief; it was painful how glad I was! I'm always looking back at that. . . . And then, to-day, without a moment's warning! Oh, dear! . . . And now you say a contract for three years! [*Gives a great sigh of relief.*] Why, it's heaven; it's simply just Paradise!

Sir C. [*going to door, R., and opening it*]. I say, Kendrick. Just see I'm not disturbed, will you? Put a boy outside my door.

Kendrick [*off*]. All right! Meeting still on!

Sir C. Yes. [*He puts red disk up, and then comes back to Emily.*] Now—er—look here, of course I'm rather peculiar; I can only do things in my own way; but look here—there are one or two things I want to talk to you about. To begin with, do you know why I've never been to a performance at the Prince's when you were in the cast?

Emily. No.

Sir C. Well, it was because I didn't want to see you acting in public. [*Walks about.*]

Emily. But——

Sir C. I'm like that, that's all. I knew you were obliged to earn your living, but I couldn't stand seeing you doing it on the stage. You may call it sentimental. I don't know. I'm just telling you. There's another thing. Do you know why I insisted on you and old woman Cleland being on the Board of Directors?

Emily [*shakes her head*]. I don't think anybody quite understood that.

Sir C. Well, it was because I thought if you were on the Board I should have good opportunities of seeing you without being forced to make them. I simply added Mrs Cleland as a cover for you, so that you wouldn't look too conspicuous. What price that for a scheme?

Emily. Now, Charlie, don't go and make me feel awkward.

Sir C. You've got to feel awkward. And so have I. I've told you those two things so that

you can't say I'm being sudden. I'm putting the matter before you in a straightforward way. I want you to marry me.

Emily. Charlie !

Sir C. That's what it is. I know I'm peculiar, but I can't help it—I can't say what I want to say. I mean I can't bring myself to say it. Now, for instance, there's that word "love." Curious thing—I can't use it ! When I hear of men saying to women, "I love you," I always think to myself, "Well, *I* couldn't say it." Don't know why ! It would be as much as I could do to say, "I'm awfully fond of you." And I couldn't say even that without being as awkward as if I were giving thanks. And yet I *am.*

Emily. You are what ?

Sir C. You know what. Of course if we hadn't been born in the same town, and almost in the same street, I expect I shouldn't have been able to talk like this to you. I should have had to be most rottenly artificial. Understand me, don't you ?

Emily. Perfectly. I'm just the same.

Sir C. Are you ? That's all right then. I suppose everybody from the Five Towns *is.* Well, what do you say ?

Emily. It's so sudden.

Sir C. Oh ! damn it all, Emily. That's really a bit too thick, that is ! After what I've told you ! Are you going to sit there and stick me out that you'd no idea I was above a bit gone on you ?

Emily. I—Charlie, you *are* awful !

Sir C. Did the idea ever occur to you that I might ask you to marry me? Or didn't it?

Emily [*after a pause*]. As questions are being put—when you got up this morning did you intend to propose to me to-day?

Sir C. No. But every morning I say to myself, "One of these days I shall have to do it."

Emily. When did you make your mind up to do it to-day?

Sir C. About five minutes ago.

Emily. Why?

Sir C. Because of the way you talked. How do I know? Because you made me feel so queer. I couldn't bear for another minute the notion of you worrying yourself to death about a living and the future, while all the time I—I—— There are some things I can *not* stand. And one of 'em is your worrying about starvation. . . . It's quite true, I *am* as hard as nails, but I'm all right. Nobody else can say it for me, so I must say it myself. I'm all *right*——

Emily [*leaning forward*]. How much are you worth?

Sir C. About a million and a quarter.

Emily. Well, can't you see how ridiculous it is, you marrying me? I haven't a cent.

Sir C. Now, listen here, Emily. If you're going to talk nonsense we'll chuck it. What in the name of Heaven does it matter to me if you haven't a cent?

Emily. I—I don't know——

Sir C. No. I should imagine you didn't!

Emily. You could marry—high up [*lifting her arm*]. In the peerage. Why, you could marry practically anybody.

Sir C. I know.

Emily. Well, why don't you?

Sir C. Because I don't. You're the sort of woman for me. What you said just now is true.

Emily. What was that?

Sir C. You're a fairly finished sort of article. You're an intellectual woman. I know I'm not so very intellectual, but it's only intellectual people that interest me all the same.

Emily. Charlie, don't call yourself names!

Sir C. You can help me, more than anybody. You've done a good bit for me as it is.

Emily. Why, what have I done?

Sir C. It's thanks to you that I'm in this theatre affair. And I like that. It's the kind of thing I'm after. And do you know who gave me the idea of giving a hundred thousand to Oxford? You! The first time you were here!

Emily. Really?

Sir C. Certainly.

Emily. I ought to tell Oxford about that.

Sir C. We should have the finest house in London, you know. I'd back you to do the hospitality business as well as any duke's daughter that was ever born. You'd soon get hold of the right people.

Emily. What do you mean by the right people? Not what they call "society" people? Because if you do——!

Sir C. [*stamping his foot*]. No, no! Of course I don't. I mean intellectual people, and the johnnies that write for the reviews, and two or three chaps in the Cabinet. I could keep you off the rotters, because I know 'em already.

Emily. It's all too dazzling, Charlie.

Sir C. Not a bit. I used to think that millionaires must be different from other people. But I'm a millionaire, and I'm just the same as I always was. As far as dazzle goes, there's nothing in it, I may as well tell you that. Well——?

Emily. I can't give you an answer now.

Sir C. Oh, yes, you can. You must. I'm not the kind of man that can wait.

Emily [*rather coldly*]. I'm afraid you'll have to wait.

Sir C. [*crestfallen*]. But you surely must know what you feel?

Emily. My dear Charles, I do *not* know what I feel.

Sir C. [*disappointed*]. When shall you know?

Emily. I can't say.

Sir C. Honest?

Emily. Of course.

Sir C. But can't you give an idea?

Emily. Of what?

Sir C. Whether it'll be yes or no.

Emily [*with an outraged air*]. Certainly not.

Sir C. Well, I can tell you one thing: if you throw me over—I—I don't know what I shall do. No, I'm damned if I do.

Emily [*stiffly*]. Good morning, Charlie.

Sir C. Look here. Why are you cross ?

Emily. I'm not cross.

Sir C. You look as if you were.

Emily. Well, good morning. [*She goes to door, back, and opens it. Boy is seen standing there. Then she shuts the door and returns to Sir C.*]

Emily. I—— [*Sir C., after gazing at her, suddenly seizes her and kisses her—a long kiss.*]

Emily. I suppose I did know all the time.

Sir C. What are you crying for ?

Emily [*inconsequently and weakly*]. This kind of thing must be awfully bad for the heart.

Sir C. [*reflectively*]. Well ! So that's done. I say—— [*Kisses her again. The telephone bell rings. They start guiltily.*]

Sir C. [*at instrument*]. Hello ! Who is it ? Yes. It's me. Oh ! [*To Emily.*] It's Francis.

Emily [*pluckily*]. You mustn't tell him.

Sir C. No, no, of course not. [*At instrument.*] What did you say ? Yes. Yes. She's—er—still here. All right. I say, he doesn't seem like giving way, I hope ? . . . Good ! [*Rings off.*]

Sir C. Francis has gone off with St John to the Garter——

Emily. The Garter ?

Sir C. The restaurant where we generally lunch. He wanted to warn me to go somewhere else. He says St John is quite calmed down now, but the sight of me might rouse him again. Like Francis, isn't it ?

Emily. I forgot to tell you that no one must on any account know for at least three months.

Sir C. All serene. But why ?

Emily. I can't do with it seeming too sudden—after the scene this morning, and with Henrietta here, too ! Besides, when it's known, we shall have to go down at *once* to Bursley, to see your mother. You may depend on that !

Sir C. Think so ? I don't seem to see myself doing the happy lover in Bursley.

Emily. Neither do I. But it will come to that. And I must have time to get my breath first.

Sir C. Let's go and have lunch somewhere, eh ?

Emily. Where ?

Sir C. The Carlton ?

Emily [*after a sigh*]. How lovely ! [*Goes to glass to pat her hair. Sir Charles, looking at her, gives a little boyish, absurd gesture of tremendous glee, then rings a bell. Enter Page-boy.*]

Sir C. [*sternly*]. Taximeter.

[*Curtain.*]

ACT III.

Notes on the Characters.

The whole atmosphere of this act is provincial.

John Worgan. — Sir Charles's elder brother. Successful doctor in an industrial town. Overworked. Nervous. Thin. Highly educated, with very artistic tastes. A great scorner of unintellectual people; and a great scorner of the public. His lip soon curls. With that, a man of the finest honour. Age 43.

Annie Worgan. — His wife. The matron. Capable. Sensible. Slightly "managing." Her husband has given her a certain culture, but fundamentally she is a housewife. She knows that she is always equal to the situation. Nicely dressed. Age 35.

Mrs Worgan.—John's mother. Stern, but very old. Worries herself about nothing; is intensely proud of her sons, but is never satisfied with them. She and Annie, by mutual concession, get on very well together. Dressed in black. Age 67.

Mrs Downes.—A widow. A good provincial "body." Stoutish. Has money. Perfectly independent. Very good-natured. Strong common-sense. "Dour." Age about 62; but better preserved than Mrs Worgan.

James Brindley.—A successful manufacturer. Bluff. Kind. No fineness of perceptions. Loud voice. The average sensual man. Age about 46.

Edward Brindley.—His son. Nervous, shy, but sturdy in defending his own opinions. Quite boyish in manner. Age 21.

All these people are fundamentally "decent" and sagacious.

John Worgan's library in his house at Bursley, in the Five Towns. Doors, L. and back centre. Comfortable. Rather shabby. One striking bookcase; several smaller ones, and odd shelves. Books lying about everywhere. On a desk are a decanter and glasses. Time: Sunday evening,

in early July. Francis is standing with his back to the fireplace. Enter Mrs Downes, shown in by a servant, L.

Mrs D. [*advancing*]. Is that you, Francis ?

Francis. Looks like me, Mrs Downes, doesn't it ? [*They shake hands.*] How are you ?

Mrs D. I'm nicely, thank you. Well, you're looking bonny. And I'm right glad to see you're making up a bit for those nineteen years when you never came near the old town.

Francis. Oh, yes. This makes three visits in eight months. Not so bad, eh ?

Mrs D. Eh, if you'd only known how your dear mother missed you, I'm sure you'd have come sooner ! For you've got a good heart, that I do know.

Francis. Well, aren't you going to sit down ? I'm only a visitor. Emily and I are staying here, you know—but I must do the honours, I suppose. Have this easy-chair.

Mrs D. [*sitting*]. Eh, I don't want anybody to do the honours for me in your brother John's house. I lay I know this house better than you do. How do you find your mother ?

Francis. Very flourishing.

Mrs D. She *is* wonderful, isn't she, considering her age.

Francis. You and she are as thick as ever, I suppose ?

Mrs D. Bless ye, yes ! It's many a long year since she and I missed having supper together on

a Sunday evening. Two old widows! [*Confidentially.*] My word, she did want to have this supper to-night at her own house! But it would have been too much for her. Your sister-in-law wouldn't hear of it, and she was quite right.

Francis. Of course! What does it matter, after all? The mater only has to step across the road. It's very convenient for her, living so close to John.

Mrs D. [*even more confidentially*]. It saves the situation. Especially as your sister-in-law is so good. But you can understand your mother wanting to have the supper at her own house, can't ye?

Francis. Oh, yes.

Mrs D. [*in a more lively, more ordinary tone*]. And where's the great man?

Francis. Charlie? The fact is he hasn't come.

Mrs D. [*astounded*]. Not come! But I was told that you and Charlie and Emily were all coming down together yesterday evening by the express.

Francis. So we were to. But Charlie didn't turn up at Euston. Of course Emily and I came on just the same. No use all three of us making a mess of it! We expected a telegram here last night to say he'd missed the train or something. But no! Not a word!

Mrs D. But what a fearful state your mother must have been in!

Francis [*nodding*]. There came a telegram this morning at eight o'clock—must have been sent

off last night—to say he should arrive for lunch. Nothing else.

Mrs D. And he hasn't come yet?

Francis. No.

Mrs D. I wondered why your mother wasn't at church this morning. I said to myself she must be stopping in to talk to Charlie. I never dreamt—and haven't you any idea——?

Francis. Oh! something unexpected, I suppose! [*Enter Annie, back.*]

Annie. Well, Mrs Downes, [*kisses her*] glad you've come early. Nice thing about Charlie, isn't it? Not been near Bursley for seven years, and now playing us this trick!

Mrs D. Eh, my dear! What a state his mother must be in!

Annie. I should think so! And the children ill, into the bargain!

Mrs D. The children ill?

Annie. Sickening for something. John's examined them. He thinks it may be measles. But he isn't sure. He's just been into the surgery to make something up, and now he's gone across to his mother's to see if there's any fresh news.

Mrs D. And Emily, where is she?

Annie. She's in the nursery.

Mrs D. Poor thing! How upset she must be!

Annie. Oh, Emily takes it very well. I expect she knows her Charlie. Anyhow, she isn't one to work herself up into a state for nothing.

Mrs D. I'm glad to hear it. What a good

thing for him he's marrying a sensible girl! After all, there's none like a Five Towns wife, that I *do* say, go *where* you will. [*Enter John, L.*]

John [*with false calm*]. Well, he's come. Hello, Mrs Downes!

Mrs D. Eh, but that's a relief!

John. He's been at the mater's about half an hour. [*Shakes hands absently with Mrs Downes.*] It seems he was kept by something unexpected yesterday—something about the *Mercury*—he's very vague. Wired last night, but of course too late for delivery here! Started out in his motor this morning early, and had a breakdown near Tring that lasted seven hours. Cheerful! No telegraph office open in this Christian country! No train! However he's here—car, chauffeur, and all? He's sent the car down to the Tiger.

Annie. I hope he hasn't brought a valet—your mother will worry quite enough as it is.

John. I should think he hadn't. Charlie knows better than that, anyway.

Annie. You told him not to dress?

John. Look here, infant! I shouldn't dream of telling him not to dress. He knows perfectly well where he is.

Francis. Annie, you mustn't forget, even though Charlie is the Shah of Persia, John is his eldest brother and the head of the family.

Annie. I was only thinking of all the grand doings he treated me to last time I was up in London. [*To John.*] How long shall we have to wait supper?

John. We sha'n't have to wait supper at all. They'll be across in a minute or two.

Francis. Johnny wishes you to understand that there's no positive necessity to turn the house inside out merely because Charlie is in the town.

Annie. He needn't pretend. He knows he's just as excited and nervous as any one. [*John winks at Francis, indicating good-natured scorn of women.*] Have you made up that medicine?

John. Yes, my dove. In spite of my excited and nervous condition, I have made up that medicine. Divide it into three equal parts, and administer one part to each of your marvellous offspring. You might also relieve Emily's natural anxiety as to her young man.

Annie. Come along, Mrs Downes, and take a peep at the chicks—if you aren't afraid of measles.

Mrs D. Me! [*Exit Mrs Downes and Annie. John smiles to himself.*]

Francis. Well, how does he strike you?

John [*condescendingly*]. Oh! he's the same as ever! Now, *he's* nervous, if you like. What would have kept him yesterday, do you know?

Francis. Haven't the least idea.

John. I thought you were in the counsels of the firm now.

Francis. So I am. And it's the most enormous lark that ever was. But I never show myself on Saturdays.

John. Lark, is it?

Francis. Well, you can imagine what fun it must be from the *Mercury.*

John. You don't suppose I read that thing, do you?

Francis. You miss a treat then. I hadn't used to read it. But now I wouldn't be without it. We've just got a new musical critic. I collect his pearls. Here's one [*takes a cutting from his pocket*] about the concert that Elgar conducted on Friday: "Sir Edward took his men through the initial movement of the *Dream of Gerontius* at a smart pace. They responded willingly to his baton."

John [*impressed*]. It's too fearfully wonderful, isn't it? I say, what do you think of Elgar, really?

Francis. Tell you in fifty years.

John. I agree with you. [*Loud voice heard off, L.*] There's Brindley.

Francis. Oh! He was here last time I was down, wasn't he? Full of stories from the *Winning Post.*

John. Yes, that's the chap. I hope he won't bore you.

Francis. My dear fellow, when one goes to school with a man, one must accept all the consequences.

John. Well, he is a bit heavy. But he's a most frightfully good bridge-player, and he's fond of the kids—and so the wife likes him. I really asked him to-night because of his son, Edward; the youth shows signs of taking to literature.

Francis. D'ye mean to say Jim Brindley has got a grown-up son?

John. Why, it's eighteen years since his wife

died. Teddy's a very decent boy. He's writing a play, and he wanted to meet you. I couldn't ask him without his father.

Francis. Have I got to do the swell dramatic critic, then ?

John. Well, you know what youths are ! [*Enter Brindley.*]

Brindley. How do, John ?

John. How do, Jim ? Where's the boy ? [*They do not shake hands.*]

Brindley. He's coming a bit later. How do, Francis ?

Francis [*shaking hands*]. How do, Jim ?

Brindley. So you've come down from the village, then ?

Francis. Yes. [*Brief awkwardness.*]

Brindley. And where's the great man ?

John. Charlie ? Oh, he'll be across soon with the mater. He's only just turned up. Came in his motor and had a breakdown.

Brindley. Oh ! had a breakdown, did he ? What's his make ?

John. Motor ? Don't know ! What is it, Francis ?

Francis. Don't know. He's got several.

Brindley. Lucky devil ! Did you see that joke in the *Winning Post* yesterday about the chauffeur and the chambermaid ?

John. Jimmy, about once a week I have to explain to you that my chief object in life is to avoid seeing the *Winning Post.* Have a drop of vermouth before supper ?

Brindley. A split soda's more in my line to-night; but I'll never say die! [*Crosses the room to help himself; as he does so, to Francis.*] You wouldn't think, to hear him talk, that he was as fond of a tasty story as any of us, would you, Francis?

John. You don't know what tasty is, my poor James. In the regions of tastiness you've never got beyond a kind of sixth-form snigger.

Brindley. Listen to him! Well, here's luck! [*Drinks.*]

Francis [*amiable for Brindley's sake*]. Doctors, eh, Jim? Doctors!

John. You sniggerers must be having a rare time just now with this Harrisburg M.P. divorce case—three columns or so every day.

Brindley [*at once interested; in a peculiar low voice*]. It is a bit hot, ain't it?

John [*to Francis*]. There! What did I tell you?

Brindley [*approaching the other two, glass in hand*]. But really! yesterday's papers *were* lively. I read several of 'em. The *Mercury* was pretty steep, but the London *Sentinel* was steeper.

Francis. And none of them print all the evidence.

Brindley [*impressed*]. Don't they!

Francis. By Jove, no! Simply daren't! And there's worse to come, it appears.

Brindley. Is there! Well, it's a rare good thing for newspapers. And I suppose they must make hay while the sun shines, same as the rest of us. [*In a still lower voice.*] By the way, seen this? [*Takes a paper from his pocket.*]

John. What is it ?

Brindley. Sunday Morning News.

John. Never see it.

Brindley. It's one of Master Charlie's papers.

John. But if I had to read all Charlie's papers I should have my hands full.

Brindley. They've been giving a series of "Famous Crimes of Passion" every week now for a long time. They must rake 'em up from old newspapers, I reckon. To-day's is the Ashby-de-la-Zouch double seduction, specially illustrated. In 1881.

John. I always thought there was something sinister about Ashby-de-la-Zouch.

Brindley. And look here.

John [*impatiently*]. What ? [*He reads from the paper.*] "Next week. The famous Dick Downes case." What in the name of Heaven——? Francis, do you know anything about this ?

Francis [*shakes his head*]. I've scarcely seen the paper except in bundles in the motor-vans. What is the famous Dick Downes case ? Downes—— Surely it's nothing to do with——

John. Don't you remember it ? Dick Downes was a Town Councillor of this town. It was a filthy thing. I can recollect as well as anything what a perfect deuce of a sensation it made—must be thirty years ago. Dick Downes was our Mrs Downes's brother-in-law. He killed himself.

Francis. I believe I have some vague recollection of it.

John. I should say so !

Brindley. Saucy, eh ? What'll the old lady say ?

John. Charles must be gone right bang off his chump !

Brindley. You may say they titivate these things up. Look at these headings of the Ashby-de-la-Zouch affair. "The virgin's chamber." "The criminal's amorous record." "The psychological moment." "The suppressed letter." "What the doctor said."

John [*glaring at the paper*]. Of course if they're going to embroider the Dick Downes case in that style——! [*Positively.*] Charlie simply *can't* know anything about it.

Francis. You needn't look at me like that, Johnny. I'm not the criminal. [*Brindley drops the paper.*]

John. I suppose you don't want that ? [*indicating paper*].

Brindley. No. I only brought it in to show you. [*The door opens, L.*]

John [*picking up the paper and crushing it angrily*]. Just keep your mouth shut, Jimmy. Here's—— [*He pitches the paper into a waste-paper basket. At the same moment enter Mrs Worgan and Sir Charles*].

Mrs W. Well, here we are at last. Good evening, Mr Brindley. [*General awkwardness.*]

Brindley. Good evening, Mrs Worgan. [*They shake hands.*] Well, Sir Charles, glad to see ye. [*Shakes hands with Sir Charles.*]

John. Look here, Jim, I don't think there's got to be any sirring. Titles are very useful in

business, but we don't want to be bored with them here, eh, Charlie ?

Sir C. Quite right.

Brindley. You must excuse your brother, Charlie. If he isn't wearing a red necktie it's because he forgot to put it on this morning.

Sir C. [*laughs*]. How do, Francis ?

Francis [*nods*]. Well, you're a nice chap !

Sir C. Yes.

Mrs W. What's the latest about the children, John ? And where are Emily and Annie ?

John. Annie and Emily will be here in a minute, mater. I believe the children are still alive.

Mrs W. John, I do wish you wouldn't talk like that.

Sir C. Measles, I hear !

John. Probably. Sit down, mater.

Sir C. How did they catch it ?

John. I'd give a sovereign to know.

Sir C. I see you've got a new under-draught grate there.

Mrs W. Fancy the boy noticing that !

John. Have you noticed my new bookcase ?

Sir C. Ah, yes ! Where did you pick that up ?

John. Old Harrop's sale. [*General awkwardness increases.*]

Brindley [*to Sir Charles*]. So you had a break-down, eh ? What was it ? Ignition ?

Sir C. Yes. What made you think of that ?

Brindley. Well—the weather, you know. I've got a small car myself.

Sir C. Have you ?

Brindley [*self-satisfied*]. Oh; yes.

Sir C. What mark ? [*They talk.*]

Francis [*in front of bookcase*]. What's this little *Selections from Swinburne*, John ? I never knew there was any volume of selections.

John. It's the Tauchnitz edition. Do you mean to say you've never had it—you, a traveller ?

Francis [*examining book*]. No. So you smuggled it in ?

John. I just brought it in. I've got lots of Tauchnitzes.

Francis. Is it any good ?

John. Pretty fair ! But it only gives part of *Anactoria.*

Francis. Oh, be dashed to it, then ! [*Puts it back.*]

Mrs W. I wish my sons would be a little more careful in their language.

Francis. Is she shocked ? She should not be shocked. [*Goes and kisses her, from behind, with a humorous gesture.*]

Mrs W. [*playfully repulsing him*]. Go away with you !

John. And just look how he's shoved this book back !

Sir C. [*to Brindley*]. And of course with no telegraph office open——!

John [*as he adjusts book on shelf, without turning towards Sir Charles*]. Now, *there's* a thing you ought to take up in one of your mighty organs !

Sir C. What, Johnny ?

John [*turning to him*]. The impossibility of tele-

graphing after 10 a.m. on Sundays. It's simply criminal. Ask any medical man. You might work it up into one of your celebrated *Mercury* sensations ! There'd be some sense in that !

Sir C. No good at all.

John. Why not ?

Sir C. No genuine public interest in it.

John. I don't know that there was such a deuce of a lot of genuine public interest in your famous campaign against Germany, my boy.

Sir C. Oh ! that's all over, now.

Mrs W. Eh, I'm thankful. We don't want any wars.

Brindley. I saw the other day you had a leader saying that friendship with Germany must be the pivot of our foreign policy, or something like that.

Sir C. Well, you see——

John. Who are you going to war with next, Charlie ? You don't seem to have been doing much lately in the boom line, from what I hear.

Brindley. So long as the Harrisburg case is on, I reckon you newspaper people don't want any boom.

Mrs W. Please don't discuss that case, Mr Brindley.

Brindley. I'm not going to, Mrs Worgan. I was only wondering what there would be about it in Tuesday's papers.

Sir C. I can tell you what there'll be about it in the *Mercury*—nothing !

Brindley. Really? But—— [*Enter Emily and Annie.*]

Annie. Ah! Well, he *has* come! How are you, Charles? Glad to see you.

Sir C. [*shaking hands*]. How are you, Annie? Very fit, thanks! You see I'm not late for supper. [*To Emily, shaking hands.*] I hope you weren't upset?

Emily. No. Not upset . . . ! But what was it?

Sir C. [*confidentially*]. I'll tell you . . . .

Mrs W. What's this? What's this? Aren't you going to kiss her? Isn't he going to kiss you, my dear, after all this anxiety he's given us?

Francis. Now, Charlie. You must be a man. [*Sir Charles and Emily kiss.*]

Mrs W. That's better.

Brindley. Nobody but old friends present. How d'ye do, Mrs Vernon? [*Shakes hands with her.*] I haven't had time to congratulate Charlie yet. But I congratulate him now. Charlie, my boy, I congratulate you. You've got on to a bit of all right. [*Sir Charles nods.*]

Annie. Jim, the children want you. Go up at once, because supper will be ready in a minute. Mrs Downes is there, gossiping with the nurse. Bring her down with you.

Mrs W. Mrs Downes has come, has she? John, you never told me.

Annie [*to Brindley as he goes*]. We sha'n't wait for Teddy, you know—if he's late.

Brindley. I've no control over Teddy. He offered me a cigar the other day.

Mrs W. I think I'll just go and have one peep at the children [*half rising*].

Annie. Now, mother, do give yourself a moment's rest. It isn't two hours since you saw them. And supper's ready.

Mrs W. Very well.

Annie [*to Brindley*]. And don't excite them, whatever you do.

Brindley [*at door, back*]. All right. [*Exit.*]

Emily [*who has been talking apart with Sir Charles*]. But what kept you, so suddenly as all that, my poor boy?

Sir C. Well, there needn't be any secret about it. As a matter of fact I was just going to tell Brindley. It's that Harrisburg divorce case. Kendrick had heard what Monday's evidence was likely to be, and I sha'n't be there on Monday, so he wanted to consult me as to what should be put in and what should be left out. It's frightfully difficult, as a question of principle.

Annie. But how can you decide beforehand?

Sir C. I'll tell you what I decided. I decided we wouldn't report any more evidence at all in either the *Mercury* or the *Courier*.

Mrs W. I'm thankful to hear it, Charles! I must say some of the things one sees nowadays in the papers——

Sir C. It's quite time some newspapers made a stand for public decency. And we're going to do it. We shall put it on all the posters: "No report of Harrisburg evidence." No newspaper ever had a poster like that before. It'll do us

a tremendous lot of good, and it'll be one in the eye for the *Sentinel.* I thought we ourselves went rather far yesterday, but the *Sentinel* went further. And we've got to beat the *Sentinel* somehow.

Annie. I think you've chosen a very good way.

John [*ironically*]. Emily, he *is* a genius. Nobody else would have thought of that.

Sir C. [*half laughing at John*]. So that's how it stands. Of course we shall run a campaign. I had a great deal of difficulty in making Kendrick see the idea. It took us three hours to thrash it out. I did my level best to catch the last train, and missed it. [*Enter Edward Brindley, L., shyly.*]

Annie. Here he is! Young man, what have you been doing to be late?

John. Teddy has been writing his play, I bet.

Mrs W. I hope he hasn't forgotten what day it is.

Edward. Good evening, Mrs John; good evening, Mrs Worgan. [*Shakes hands.*] Sorry I'm late. Good evening [*shaking hands with John*].

John. This is Mrs Vernon, formerly of the Prince's Theatre, Teddy. This is Francis, dramatic critic of *Men and Women,* and this is Charles, boss of the said theatre. You may be said to be in the theatrical world at last. But don't be nervous. [*To the others.*] Let me introduce Edward Brindley, dramatist. [*Edward shakes hands.*]

Sir C. So you want to write plays, do you?

Edward [*to John*]. I say, Mr Worgan, why have you started right off talking about me like this?

Annie. People who come late must expect to be conspicuous.

John. Besides, you don't imagine you're asked here to-night in your private capacity, do you? Not a bit. You're asked as a playwright. Why! he's had a play performed at the Drill Hall! It had half a column in the *Signal*, and an uninterrupted run of one night.

Edward. Look here, Mrs John, can't you stop him?

John [*continuing*]. Have you read any of Francis's dramatic criticisms in *Men and Women*?

Edward. Yes.

John. What do you think of them?

Edward. I think some of them are pretty good.

John. And the others?

Edward. Oh—look here, I say!

John. You see how uneven you are, Francis. [*To Edward.*] Got your new play in your pocket, Teddy?

Edward. Of course I haven't.

John. Well, tell us about it.

Edward. Where's the dad?

John. Never mind where the dad is. Perhaps he's under the sofa. Tell us about it.

Edward. No.

Emily. Please, *do*!

Annie. He's very shy for his age, isn't he?

Edward. What do you want me to tell you?

Francis. Well, for instance, what kind of people are there in it?

Edward. Oh, just ordinary, common people—like us.

Francis. Not provincials ?

Edward. Yes. Five Towns people.

Francis. We sha'n't care much for that, we critics ?

John. There ! What did I tell you ?

Edward. Why not ?

Francis. Why not ? Well, you see, we've almost all of us come from the provinces, and we try to forget it. We live in clubs in Pall Mall or Dover Street, and we never leave them until it's time to go to the theatre. We don't even *read* about the provinces, except occasionally in Bradshaw. . . . I suppose you want to make a great success ?

Edward. Yes.

Francis. Then I should alter the scene to London.

Edward. But I don't know anything about London.

Francis. All the better.

Edward. I'm sure you're only rotting me. [*To Emily.*] Isn't he ?

Emily. I don't know. But you stick up for yourself.

Francis. Of course I'm not rotting him. Who *are* the folks in the play ?

Edward. Well, it's a Wesleyan Methodist set —they're very strong in the town, you know.

Francis. Oh, I see. It's a farce ?

Edward. No. It's very nearly a tragedy.

Francis [*shakes his head*]. Won't do! Won't have a chance! If you want to make a London audience laugh, you've only got to mention the word Methodist, and the whole house will go into fits.

Mrs W. Really, Francis?

Francis. Yes, mater.

Mrs W. I'm not partial to the Wesleyans myself, but I see no reason for going into a fit when I meet them in the street.

Edward [*to Francis*]. But why?

Francis. I suppose they perceive something fundamentally comic in a Methodist. A play full of Methodists would be a great idea for a farce, and I don't think it's ever been done. But if you're on the tragic side at all, you ought to change your Methodists to Church of England. That will at least make people gloomy. I suppose they're very rich—Methodists usually are.

Edward. No. They're all poor, except one, and he's a miser. The hero is a rate-collector. And he's supposed to live in one of those new cottages down Brougham Street. It's rather taken from life, you know.

Francis. My poor young man!

Edward. I read in one of your articles that what the theatre needs is closer contact with life, anyway! And I've read it in lots of articles!

Francis. Yes, I admit that's how we talk. But let any one try it on, and we're naturally disturbed in our habits, and we don't like it. Is it nearly done, this play?

Edward. It *is* done. I finished it to-night.

Francis. Well, I really don't know what to say! A rate-collector in a new cottage down Brougham Street, Bursley, and all Methodists! Where were you thinking of sending the play to start with?

Edward. I thought I'd try it on George Alexander; I believe in flying high.

Francis. The very man! I never thought of him! [*All laugh.*]

Edward [*to John*]. I know you've made it up with your brother to rot me.

John. I assure you, Teddy——

Edward. Oh, yes, you have. But I don't care. I daresay it's awfully bad—in fact, I know it is—but it's like life, and I don't care!

Emily. Will you let me read it?

Edward [*after examining her face*]. Yes. But they told me you'd done with the theatre, now.

Emily. So I have. But I should like to read it.

Francis [*getting up and taking Edward by the shoulder, in a serious, kind tone*]. Come along, Edward, and let's talk about it somewhere privately. [*A gong.*]

Annie. You can't go and talk about it now—supper's ready. [*Francis and Edward talk apart.*]

John. I notice Charlie shows no rabid desire to let this play be produced at the Prince's. Nothing less than Shakespeare there nowadays! What's become of St John, by the way?

Sir C. Gone to New York. You ought to come and see *The Merchant of Venice.* It's a colossal success.

John. I've seen it. . . . Saw it last week but one.

Sir C. Really? You should have let me know you were coming.

John. Oh! I was only up for one night. A "G.P." can't go away for six weeks. Your what's-his-name—Cleland—was very polite, and gave me a stall.

Sir C. Clever fellow, Cleland! Very clever! Well, what do you think of it?

John. My dear chap—you're my guest.

Sir C. [*bluffing it out*]. Oh, go ahead, man.

John [*after a pause*]. When St John had the Prince's it used to be worth going to.

Sir C. Yes, and till I came he invariably lost money.

John. What does that matter?

Sir C. Exactly! Exactly! "What does it matter?" It's always the way with you superior persons—you want something, but you expect somebody else to pay for it.

Annie. John—that's one for you. Supper, please. Come along, mother.

Mrs W. I think there's a lot of wild talk been going on.

John [*as the company is filing out*]. I say, Charlie.

Sir C. Yes.

John. Just a word. You needn't wait for us, mater. Sha'n't be a minute. [*Mrs Worgan reluctantly follows the others out, back. Sir Charles and John remain alone.*]

Sir C. What's up ?

John [*quite friendly*]. Look, here, Charlie, boy, you've been talking about public morals, and the *Daily Mercury*. I agree with you, in principle, though I think you're quite wrong to suppress the Harrisburg evidence entirely. But what I want to know is : How do you defend the *Sunday Morning News* ?

Sir C. [*at a loss for an instant*]. Defend the *Sunday Morning News* ? Oh !—it's the " Crimes of Passion " series that you're driving at ? [*Laughs.*]

John. It is.

Sir C. Well, you see, that's quite different. It's a question of a different public. There's something funny about the Sunday public—— [*Stops.*]

John. I suppose you mean that when the great and enlightened public has an idle morning to pass, its sole resource is indecency ?

Sir C. [*laughing*]. Well, you know what people are. I don't expect anybody could teach you much.

John. But how do you defend that " Crimes of Passion " stuff ?

Sir C. I don't defend it. It doesn't need any defending. I simply give our readers what they want. I'm not a guardian of public morals.

John. You pretend to be, in the *Mercury*.

Sir C. Don't I tell you the *Mercury's* different ! If I go on the moral lay for a bit in the *Mercury* that's because I think the *Mercury* public want it. But the Sunday public want something else, and I give it them.

John. How can you be sure they want it ?

Sir C. I can be sure because the circulation has gone up a couple of hundred thousand in four months.

John. I was thinking perhaps you didn't know anything about it——

Sir C. Oh yes! Naturally I can't keep an eye on everything. But the main features of policy come from *me*—you may bet on that.

John. Well, something's got to be done.

Sir C. My dear chap, what the deuce are you talking about?

John. I'm talking about Mrs Downes.

Sir C. What *about* Mrs Downes?

John. She's in my house. She's playing with my children. She's the mater's oldest friend. You'll meet her at supper. And next week in one of your unspeakable papers you're going to rake up old scandals about her family.

Sir C. What——? [*At a loss.*]

John [*snatches up paper, reads*]. "Next week, the famous Dick Downes case."

Sir C. [*smiles grimly*]. Oh! I didn't know they'd got on to that. Really! As I say, I direct the policy, but I don't see everything. Let's have a look. [*Takes paper and looks at it.*] Yes. It *is* a shade on the side of being awkward, isn't it?

John [*sarcastically*]. A stickler for social conventions might conceivably object to the situation you've created, my boy.

Sir C. She hasn't seen it?

John. Fortunately, no.

Sir C. Well, she won't see it to-night unless

you show it to her. So that's all right. . . . So you read the *Sunday Morning News*, do you? [*Mrs Worgan appears at door.*]

John [*violently*]. Indeed I don't read the filthy rag. Brindley brought it in to show me.

Sir C. Come, come, Johnny! You needn't rave. [*Enter Mrs Worgan, who has been listening uneasily at open door, back.*]

Mrs W. [*advancing, disturbed*]. What's amiss? What's this? What's this about Mrs Downes?

Sir C. Nothing, mater, nothing.

John. Mater, didn't I tell you to go in to supper?

Mrs W. What are you hiding from me? Charlie, give me that paper.

John [*resigned*]. Better give it her, now, and have done with it. It's public enough, in all conscience!

Sir C. Oh, very well. [*Defiantly hands paper to Mrs Worgan, who with difficulty adjusts her spectacles to read it. A pause.*]

John. Bottom of that page, mother—where you are now. [*An awkward pause while she reads.*]

Mrs W. [*much moved*]. Well, Charlie, I'd never have believed it of you. There are lots of things that I deliberately close my eyes to, and a Sunday paper is one of them. But I never dreamt that even in a Sunday paper. . . . Raking up the Downes case! . . . [*Weeps.*] I shall fetch Emily. [*Exit quickly.*]

Sir C. It's unfortunate, of course, but these things do happen.

John. There's no real harm done yet. Of course you'll stop it?

Sir C. Stop it! My dear fellow, how can I stop it?

John. Aren't you the boss?

Sir C. It's too late. Those inner sheets will be on the machine to-morrow morning. We have to dovetail in our machining as well as we can. Besides, *why* should I stop it?

John. But you *must* stop it. The thing's unthinkable, utterly unthinkable!

Sir C. It's simply a coincidence, an accident.

John. What's simply an accident?

Sir C. Supposing I hadn't been down here? Supposing Brindley hadn't shown you the paper? You'd never have seen it. Or you'd have seen it too late. And you wouldn't have thought twice about it. But just because I'm here——

John [*angrily*]. Shouldn't I have thought twice about it!

Sir C. No. After all, what is it? We're just reprinting what was common property twenty-five years ago. It isn't as if it had been kept private till now. How can it affect Mrs Downes? *She* wasn't in it. Even her husband scarcely appeared in it.

John. Rot! It will be a reflection on the whole Downes family. It must necessarily be very unpleasant for any member of that family.

Sir C. I can't help that. Dick Downes should have thought of that before he began murdering. If I had to be always considering about being

unpleasant to people, I should have something to do — with forty papers. Look here, Johnny. You're awfully clever and intellectual and all the rest of it; but you're looking at this in rather a provincial way. If you'd lived in London more——

John. Don't be idiotic! London's the most provincial town in England—invariably vulgar, reactionary, hysterical, and behind the rest of the country. A nice sort of place England would be if we in the provinces had to copy London. I'm looking at it in a provincial way, am I? Well, it's a good thing I am!

Sir C. There you go! That's the provincial all over! [*smiling*]. Now let me put it to you calmly, John. Here, I have an immense organisation——

John [*savagely*]. To the devil with your immense organisation!

Sir C. I say I have an immense organisation—an organisation that you've no conception of, perhaps. A paper that sells eleven hundred thousand copies a week. A paper that has a special distributing agent in every town of England. A paper that prints in every issue a sermon by a well-known preacher. A paper that has its Parliamentary sketch written by an M.P. A paper that comes up to the North every Saturday night in a special train—*my* train, with five or six vans full of parcels and my sorters. A paper that's known and read all over the world. One of the most complicated pieces

of mechanism in the whole of journalism. And you want me to interfere with it just because an old lady happens to be in the same house as I am! [*Snorts.*]

John. My dear chap, I'm not a public meeting. I don't care how vast nor how complicated your mechanism is. What does it matter even if you sell eleven hundred million copies a week? This isn't a mathematical problem. If your vast and complicated mechanism makes it impossible for me to look one of my friends in the face across my supper table, then your vast and complicated mechanism has gone wrong and must be corrected.

Sir C. Nonsense! How can it harm her? It doesn't touch her. All she has to do is not to read it. It isn't so much the expense and the awful inconvenience of stopping the thing that I object to——

John. Then what do you object to?

Sir C. The principle.

John. Principle! I must say you've got a nerve, you have, to talk about principle!

Sir C. I've got my principles, like anybody else.

John. You've got too many principles, Charlie. That's what's the matter with you. You've got one for the *Mercury*, and another for this Sunday rag.

Sir C. Don't be childish! You surely ought to be able to see, with your brains, that I can't be the same in forty different papers. I've no desire

at all to ram my personal ideas down the throats of forty different publics. I give each what it wants. I'm not a blooming reformer. I'm a merchant.

John. On Sundays you're a muck-merchant. But you've no right to commit a nuisance.

Sir C. Rubbish! All I do is to reflect the public taste. And that's why the *Mercury*, for instance, is the most powerful newspaper in England to-day.

John. Yes, among errand-boys—I believe.

Sir C. [*really vexed for the first time*]. You needn't talk like that. Of course, *here*, I'm only your brother——

John. Well, I suppose you are. But I must say I never dreamt you'd make the slightest bother about stopping this monstrous outrage.

Sir C. And I must say I never dreamt you were so hypocritical. Damn it! every one knows all about the public. You stuff 'em with medicine. I give 'em something else. Both of us have to take the public as it is! [*Calming himself.*] No, no, my dear chap, I really must be allowed to conduct my own business.

John. Let me ask you one question. Who gets the profits of this beastliness?

Sir C. I object to the word.

John. Call it angelic pureness, then. Do you? [*Bell rings again.*]

Sir C. You may depend I get most of the profits.

John [*with slow, cutting enunciation*]. And do you think I can allow two people to meet at my table, one of whom is making money out of a

gratuitous exposure of painful secrets in the other's life — and that other an old lady? Whether Mrs Downes knows what you're doing or not is beside the point. She will know it. Can't you see that the situation is absolutely impossible? Or have you got no sense of decency left?

Sir C. Aren't you talking a bit tall?

John. No.

Sir C. Well, then, you mean you'd like me to go? [*Enter Emily unseen at first by the brothers. She has the newspaper in her hand.*]

John. How can I answer that? There's the mater to think of.

Sir C. Well, I never guessed Bursley was such a hole!

John [*who has seen Emily*]. Think it over a moment. I'm going into the surgery for a second. [*Half to himself.*] I suppose that confounded supper is waiting. [*Exit, L.*]

Emily [*deeply disturbed*]. Charlie!

Sir C. Yes, you may well say "Charlie!" I've brought you into a nice family, upon my soul! I suppose the mater's been telling you about this preposterous business. [*Emily nods.*] Well, I must confess I'd no idea John was such a frantic prig. . . . Because I run a paper to sell, and I happen to—— No, I'm damned if I can make it out! I'm damned if I can, and that's flat.

Emily. There's your mother to be thought of. She is very upset indeed.

Sir C. My dear girl, I came down simply to

satisfy the mater. That's all right. But I'm not going to have my family interfering with my business. It's too ridiculous. Why doesn't Francis knock some sense into some of 'em? Where is he? Cleared off, of course! That's Francis all over!

Emily. But, Charlie, don't you think——

Sir C. Look here, Em, you can't understand these things. I don't expect you to, so far as that goes.

Emily [*solemnly and stiffly*]. Do you mean to say that you won't put a stop to that Downes case, whatever it costs you?

Sir C. Certainly not! [*After a pause.*] I might just as well be asked to stop the whole series, and fill the pages with extracts from the Acts of the Apostles. [*Emily is astounded, shocked, and desperate. She does not know what to do, and she hesitates. Then her whole demeanour changes. She approaches Sir Charles coaxingly, caressingly, putting forth all her charm and persuasiveness. She relies on her sensuous power over Sir Charles.*]

Emily. Charlie, to please me!

Sir C. No, no [*half repulsing her*]. What you women want is peace at any price. You don't appreciate the argument at all.

Emily. Dearest, I don't pretend to appreciate the argument. But to please me—it's the first time I've ever asked you to do anything for me. Do! *Do!* To please your Emily [*caressing him*].

Sir C. [*after hesitation*]. Oh, very well, then!

Emily. And you'll be nice, and jolly! You

won't look glum! You know how nice you *can* be!

Sir C. [*sighing, half smiling, shaking his head humorously*]. You girls—you simply do what you like. [*Re-enter John.*]

John. Of course, Charles——

Sir C. That'll do, old chap. I'll stop it. I'll see to it first thing to-morrow morning. Keep your hair on.

John [*looking at him*]. Oh, well, that's all right. [*Enter Annie, back.*]

Annie [*taking Sir Charles by the ear playfully, but with a certain concealea exasperation*]. Come along! Am I to be mistress in my own house, or am I not? Never did I know such a family of arguers as you Worgans. But if you think I'm going to have my supper spoiled, you are mistaken. Come along, you others. [*Exeunt Annie and Sir Charles, followed by John. Emily is left alone. Enter Mrs Downes, L.*]

Mrs D. [*hurrying*]. Bless us, I hope I'm not keeping everybody. Are they gone in? And I haven't shaken hands with the great man yet.

Emily. Mrs Downes, I just want to tell you——

Mrs D. Eh, what's amiss?

Emily. If anybody says anything to you about —about something in the *Sunday Morning News* —it isn't true. I mean it's been stopped. Charlie didn't know about it—he's——

Mrs D. Eh, bless ye, my dear. Do you suppose I don't know about *that*? Why, half a dozen different people took the trouble to tell me

about it before nine o'clock this morning! But I make naught of it. I know what those Sunday papers are! No respectable person would *look* at one of them. You say Charlie didn't know—you'll excuse my plain speaking, my dear, but he ought to have known! . . . There's only one thing that puts me about, and that is—what will his poor mother think? [*Goes towards door, back, then returns to Emily.*] My dear, I do hope you'll be able to influence him for good. [*Exit back. Emily's face is a study. Enter Francis back.*]

Francis. I say, the missis is getting cross. Hello! You surely aren't crying?

Emily [*crying*]. No.

Francis. Look here. I don't really see what you've got to be upset about. John and Charlie are simply behaving like angels to each other. The whole bother is settled satisfactorily, and I've no doubt it's you that did it. The fact is, you ought to be proud; you convinced him.

Emily. No, I didn't convince him. I only caressed him.

Francis. Well, I suppose this supper must be eaten. [*Movement towards door.*]

[*Curtain.*]

ACT IV

Scene: Same as Act I. Time: Afternoon. Sir Charles and Kendrick are sitting together.

Sir C. [*handing document to Kendrick*]. I think that'll do, for a draft. Be sure to have it typed with wider spaces between the lines this time, so that I can see to read it better. Shareholders don't like hesitations, especially in figures.

Kendrick. Yes, I'll attend to that.

Sir C. [*rubbing his hands*]. Well, now there's the question of new developments, Kendrick.

Kendrick. I should have thought we'd developed enough to satisfy anybody, for the moment.

Sir C. My boy, when I read that report, showing a dividend of thirty per cent., and a reserve of four hundred thousand pounds, and a total annual circulation of seven hundred million copies, what do you suppose will be the first thought in the minds of the shareholders? Gratitude? Not much! Their very first thought will be that we ought in mere justice to give 'em thirty-five per cent. next year instead of thirty.

Kendrick. Greedy swine!

Sir C. By the way, talking of circs., how much did you say the religious department had fallen as a whole?

Kendrick. Twenty-three thousand.

Sir C. There's pretty certain to be some awkward questions as to our row with the Bishop

of London. I must think that over. What's the paragraph in the report, exactly ?

Kendrick [*reading*]. "Your directors have pleasure in stating that, despite much unfair and not disinterested criticism, the religious journals of the company have, while conserving their high character, more than maintained their circulations, and that this important department of your activities is in an extremely satisfactory condition."

Sir C. So it is, considering the extraordinary slump in religion—which I hope to Heaven is only temporary. You've sacked the Reverend Mr Haliburton ?

Kendrick. No. Not yet.

Sir C. Kendrick, I believe you've got a weakness for that chap. [*With emphasis.*] He must be sacked.

Kendrick. I've got no weakness for him. But who's going to take his place ?

Sir C. I am—for the next three months ! That satisfy you ?

Kendrick. Oh ! all right, then ! He'll never get another shop, you know.

Sir C. You needn't tell me he's growing old. I don't care if he's ninety and the only support of his aged mother. He doesn't understand religion, and so he's no use to us. [*Softening.*] You might offer him a sub-editorship, if you like. There's something vacant on *Racing Illustrated*, isn't there ?

Kendrick. Think he'd accept it ?

Sir C. He'd accept it right enough. Besides, there's no compulsion. He can leave it if he

likes. Now, listen, about new developments! [*With an important air.*] I've got something!

Kendrick. Yes?

Sir C. The *Daily Mercury* and the *Courier* are going to become the militant organs of the women's suffrage. You understand—the militant organs.

Kendrick. It's an idea!

Sir C. I should think it was an idea!

Kendrick. And what about the *Courier's* celebrated question after the big House of Commons raid six months ago?

Sir C. What question?

Kendrick. "Why not revive the ducking-stool?"

Sir C. Did we say that?

Kendrick. We said it across four columns. It'll want some explaining away.

Sir C. Oh, no! We've been converted, that's all. Quite simple. Just see how public opinion has changed! We shall be the first really to take the thing up.

Kendrick. Why there's at least a dozen dailies that have been in favour of women's suffrage right through!

Sir C. Yes, but they don't count. Kendrick, how dull you are! When I say "take the thing up" I mean *take it up.* See?

Kendrick. Oh! You mean, *run it.*

Sir C. I do.

Kendrick. A bit dangerous, isn't it?

Sir C. My dear fellow, if I wasn't sure that

it's all over except the shouting, I wouldn't touch it with my foot. But it's an absolute cert. And this is just the moment for us to come in and rake up the glory. It's now or never.

Kendrick. Mrs Vernon is a suffragist, she was telling me not long since.

Sir C. Oh, yes, naturally !

Kendrick. You ought to write to Lady Calder, and get *her* to do something. She's frightfully keen on it.

Sir C. No, I'm not going to write to Lady Calder. She'd be coming here. She'd be a nuisance.

Kendrick. She'd be very useful, with her standing. Of course, I know she used to—sort of—as it were, run after you. But as you're engaged now—her hopes——

Sir C. My dear chap, I'm not going to write to Lady Calder. She's one of the kind that never give up hope till you're dead. We can manage this campaign without Lady Calder. Now the first thing is — there are six suffragettes in Holloway. The *Mercury* has got to get 'em out. We must begin on the Home Secretary.

Kendrick. Yes, but—— [*Enter Page-boy with a card.*]

Sir C. [*impatiently*]. What's the use of the red disk being up ? [*Taking card.*] Oh ! Run down and tell his lordship I'm coming. [*Exit Boy. Sir Charles gets up and takes his hat.*] It's Lord Henry Godwin. He wants me to go down to him

[*taking stick and gloves*]. I think I know what it is—— [*Enter Francis, L.*]

Francis. I say, Charlie.

Sir C. Can't stop now. Sha'n't be long, I expect. [*Exit Sir Charles, back. He hurries, but tries to appear deliberate.*]

Francis. I was going to tell my brother that you had better look out for another dramatic critic for *Men and Women*, Kendrick.

Kendrick. Really? I'm sorry to hear that. Doctor been forbidding you to go out at night?

Francis. No! It's simply that I can't stand that capricious widow any longer.

Kendrick. Capricious widow? What capricious widow?

Francis. The capricious widow. I came up specially yesterday from a holiday in the Five Towns to go to the new piece at the Globe, and there she was once more! She's been in nearly every play I've seen, and she gets worse and worse.

Kendrick. I see—you're joking again.

Francis. Indeed I'm not! That eternal widow's charm, beauty, wilfulness, freaks, pranks, crochets, and skirt-whiskings are having a serious effect on my constitution. I feel that if I am to be condemned to see her again, I ought to take the precaution of writing my obituary before I go to my execution.

Kendrick. Well, speaking for myself, all I say is [*in a low voice*] give me a music-hall. [*Enter Page-boy, who announces Mrs Vernon.*]

Francis. Mrs Vernon! Sir Charles isn't here. But ask her to come in.

Kendrick. You'd better give your notice to Sir Charles. [*Exit, R. Enter Emily.*]

Francis. Hello, Em! [*Shakes hands.*] What's the meaning of this?

Emily. What's the meaning of what?

Francis. You being here. I thought you were staying with the mater till the end of the week, to make up for Charlie's absence.

Emily. N-o. It wasn't definitely understood. [*They sit down.*]

Francis. I suppose you couldn't stand it any longer. I don't blame you. It must be very trying for a woman to have to stay with the family of her future husband. The fact is, some one ought to apologise to you on behalf of the family, and I'm inclined to do it myself.

Emily. Don't be affected, Francis. You know as well as I do that John and his wife are just my sort of people, and I'm sure that nobody could have been kinder than your mother.

Francis. Well, as a matter of fact, I suppose we *did* come through Sunday night rather well. After the shindy, the supper was really a credit to every one concerned. I was proud of us all. . . . I expect these episodes must happen in all families. . . . Still, I felt relieved, you know, when Charlie announced on Monday morning that he could only do what John wanted by coming to town himself. And to be candid, Em——

Emily. Oh Frank—with your candour . . . !

Francis. I wasn't what you may call sorry when I had to come back myself on Tuesday for that play. I was only sorry after I'd seen the play. By the by, I've decided to give up dramatic criticism.

Emily. Why ?

Francis. I'll tell you. I can't stand the wise, gentle, cunning, well-dressed philosopher of fifty. I assure you I can't *stand* him.

Emily. Which one ?

Francis. There is only one. He is appearing simultaneously in eleven West-End theatres. I don't mind Sherlock Holmes ; I don't mind Rufus Isaacs ; I don't mind Marcus Aurelius. But when these three are all tied together with a piece of string and multiplied by eleven, I find the phenomenon very bad for my nervous system. No money is worth the strain.

Emily. Told Charlie ?

Francis. No. I came here to break the news to him, but he was just going out. I'm surprised you didn't meet him at the lift.

Emily. I walked up. Has he gone for the day ?

Francis. Oh, no ! He said he should be in again soon. Better wait if you feel you can't live much longer without seeing him. When did you arrive ?

Emily. I've just come.

Francis. Straight here from Euston ?

Emily. Yes.

Francis [*after a pause*]. Now look here, Em. What's happened ? You and I are pals.

Emily. My dear Francis, *nothing* has happened.

Francis. Mater hasn't been making herself unpleasant ?

Emily. Oh, Francis, how tiresome you are !

Francis. I was only thinking she might have been preaching morals at Charlie through you.

Emily. Not at all. Charlie has scarcely been mentioned.

Francis. And Charlie and you have kept the peace ?

Emily. You and I saw him off on Monday morning, didn't we ?

Francis. Yes. The parting seemed to lack none of the proper ceremonies. And no doubt since then you've exchanged letters.

Emily. We've scarcely had time to exchange letters ; but he's written to me, since you are so curious.

Francis. Curiosity is my greatest virtue. Not had time ! [*Pause. Emily shuts her lips.*] I hope his letter was all that it ought to be.

Emily [*ironically smiling*]. Would it interest you to read it ?

Francis. Because I gather vaguely that he spent most of Monday in massacring the whole staff. Yesterday he was less homicidal. To-day he is like an archangel. By the way, he hasn't stopped that series altogether—in the *Sunday Morning News.* He's just changed the Downes case for some other case. I suppose you know ?

Emily. No, I didn't.

Francis. There are some things that Charlie doesn't *see.*

Emily. What do you mean ?

Francis. I mean he has a blind spot.

Emily [*sarcastically*]. And you haven't enlightened him ?

Francis [*also sarcastically*]. No. We must leave that to you. You are the only person who can enlighten him—with your caresses ! [*very slightly accentuating the last word*].

Emily. Frank, truly I don't know what's come over you to-day. You say we're pals, but——

Francis. Em ! [*With an impulsive slight movement towards her. Enter Sir Charles, who is very surprised to see Emily.*]

Emily [*self-consciously*]. Well, Charles, I'm here, you see. [*Francis makes a gesture to indicate that he perceives he is in the way, and exit, L.*]

Sir C. So this is why there was no letter from you this morning !

Emily [*as he approaches to kiss her*]. Better not kiss me.

Sir C. Oh !

Emily. I've got a cold. [*In a firmer tone, as he still approaches and seizes her hands.*] No, really ! I mean it !

Sir C. [*with a gesture of uncomprehending submission*]. Nothing wrong, eh ? I hope the mater hasn't been——

Emily. Now please don't say all that Francis has just been saying. It's extraordinary how each of you Worgans imagines that the rest of

the family is impossible to get on with. Your mother and I agreed perfectly.

Sir C. That's absolutely all right, my dear girl. [*Sits down near her.*] I was only wondering why you'd come back so suddenly.

Emily. Suddenly ? I slept four nights in Bursley. One night was enough for you.

Sir C. It *is* a hole, isn't it ? Well, anyhow, I'm glad you're here. News, my child, news !

Emily. Indeed ?

Sir C. Did you see a carriage and pair at the door when you came in ?

Emily. Yes.

Sir C. Lord Henry Godwin's. He won't have a motor, you know. He sent up to ask me to go down and speak to him.

Emily. I understood you and he weren't on speaking terms—after—after that epigram of his.

Sir C. Oh ! errand-boys ? What do I care for his epigrams—now that it suits me to play up to him ?

Emily. I should have thought that he might have come up here to see you, instead of you going down to his carriage.

Sir C. Gout. And he was in a deuce of a hurry. Besides—the point is that his uncle is Chancellor of Oxford University. It was his uncle who sent him to me. They want to make me an honorary D.C.L.

Emily. What for ?

Sir C. Well, considering that I'm by far the largest subscriber to their special fund ! . . .

D.C.L. of Oxford? That's something, you know. I only wish it could be conferred before our annual meeting. It would make some of them sit up, that would—a D.C.L. of Oxford presiding over a meeting of Worgan shareholders! It would show some of 'em I'm getting there, all the same. Em, that idea of yours, of me giving something handsome to the 'Varsity, was the greatest idea you ever had.

Emily. It wasn't my idea at all.

Sir C. Oh, stuff! Don't be modest! [*Nods his head with slow content.*] D.C.L. of Oxford, eh? I've known for some time that they were thinking of it.

Emily. What does D.C.L. stand for?

Sir C. [*slightly taken aback*]. It's Doctor of something. [*Rises to consult a book.*]

Emily. I suppose so.

Sir C. [*shutting book with a snap*]. Doctor of Civil Law, that's it! [*Sits down.*] Well, I shall be a Doctor of Civil Law. And I'm running the Prince's, which has always been considered the most intellectual theatre in London. What's more, I'm running it at a profit. [*A pause. Emily makes no remark.*] And there's another thing I must tell you. I'm going to run women's suffrage for all it's worth in both the *Mercury* and the *Courier*. Yes, I decided that in the train on Monday morning. I've been thinking it over ever since. You're quite right—all the cleverest men are on that side, and of course it's bound to win. It'll be positively

popular in six months' time. Don't you think so?

Emily. I don't know about it being popular.

Sir C. [*a little dashed*]. Don't you? [*Decisively.*] Well, anyhow I shall take the risk. I'll *make* it popular. And to begin with—I've settled one thing in my own mind—if your little friends the raiders aren't let out of Holloway, quick, the Home Secretary will have to be shifted.

Emily. Shifted?

Sir C. And the *Mercury* will shift him.

Emily. But it isn't his fault. Everybody knows that.

Sir C. I don't care. He's the figurehead, and he must suffer.

Emily. But what shall you *do*?

Sir C. I shall run a campaign against him, of course; a *Mercury* campaign! You'll see, you'll see! I say—what about that house in South Audley Street?

Emily. House in South Audley Street? Oh, yes: you mentioned one in your letter.

Sir C. I want us to go and look at it at once. The fact is, Em, I'm simply dying to see you doing the hostess in my drawing-room. I haven't *begun* yet, and I want to begin, and I can't till we're married. Let's go along to South Audley Street now, eh, as you're here? I feel like a spree!

Emily. Oh, not now!

Sir C. Why not?

Emily. I didn't come here to go to South Audley Street.

Sir C. [*looking at her*]. Vexed, is she? I fancied there was something wrong.

Emily. No. I'm not at all vexed [*shortly*].

Sir C. [*good-humouredly, cajolingly*]. Well, you surely aren't going to sit there and tell me that life is a dream of bliss at the present moment. What was afoot between you and Francis when I came in?

Emily. Nothing.

Sir C. Come now, there must be something. What is it? What was he telling you, or you him? You were as thick as thieves.

Emily. Really he told me nothing—except that you'd suppressed the Downes case.

Sir C. Well, as I'd promised to suppress it——!

Emily. But that you were continuing the series.

Sir C. Oh! that's it, is it? Great Scott! Great Scott! Now listen, Em. I don't want to argue. I prefer not to. But if you've still got that matter on your mind I'll suppress the whole blessed series. I can't stop next week's, because by this time three-quarters of it is printed off; but the series shall end there. Simply to please you!

Emily [*curtly*]. I don't want you to do anything simply to please me.

Sir C. [*hurt*]. I like that, I like that, I must confess! What did you say on Sunday night? You admitted you couldn't appreciate the argument, and you asked me to stop the article just to

please you. You said it was the first time you had ever asked me to do anything for you. And I gave in at once. I thought you were satisfied. Well, it seems you aren't. I offer to give in further, simply to please you, though I'm taking hundreds of pounds out of my shareholders' pockets and acting against my own judgment into the bargain, and you try to sit on me by saying that you don't want me to do anything simply to please you. What do you want? Whatever it is, you shall have it. I've no intention of bickering with you. That's not my style. But I should like to know where I stand.

Emily. I hate the thought of you doing anything simply to please me—I hate it!

Sir C. Then why did you ask me to, on Sunday?

Emily [*bursting out*]. Can't you see? Because there was nothing else to be done! You must be blind! The situation was merely unspeakable. It *had* to be brought to an end. And there was only that way of bringing it to an end. You weren't open to argument. You seemed to have no notion at all of what people's feelings were. So I just had to wheedle you into it! To wheedle you into it!

Sir C. [*laughing slightly and easily*]. Oh! that was it? Well, you had the best of me. It just shows how you can twist me round your little finger when you want to. That's all right! I make you a present of it.

Emily. No. It isn't all right. It's because

I feel it isn't all right that I've come back to-day —and straight here from the station! That's why I didn't answer your letter—because if I'd written I should have had to say something that I'm—well, I suppose it's too proud, yes, too proud, not to tell you like this, face to face.

Sir C. And what's that?

Emily. It would be a mistake for us to marry.

Sir C. [*incredulous*]. Do you mean to say you want to throw me over?

Emily. I don't think we ought to marry.

Sir C. [*after a pause*]. When did you begin to think that?

Emily. On Sunday night.

Sir C. I don't know what you're driving at, and that's flat! Here I do exactly what you ask, and before I know where I am, I'm to be chucked! Because you can simply do what you like with me, you want to chuck me! I'm glad I never pretended to understand women, anyway!

Emily. It isn't a thing that can be argued about, Charlie. I've thought it over very carefully, and I'm perfectly sure that it will be best for us to break off. Of course, I'm awfully sorry. It's very awkward for both of us. And it's nobody's fault. I'm certain we shouldn't do ourselves any good by discussing it. So let's leave it at that.

Sir C. No! I'm damned if I'll leave it at that! I've always played the game with you, and I expect you to play the game with me. I say I *expect. I*'ve done nothing that I'm ashamed of.

Emily. I don't think you have. That's just the trouble.

Sir C. What's just the trouble?

Emily. We differ as to the precise point where shame ought to begin.

Sir C. I don't see—— [*Stops.*]

Emily [*hotly*]. Of course you don't. You needn't tell me that! Do you imagine that if I thought you saw, I should be talking to you like this? Not exactly! I should simply have returned your ring with my compliments.

Sir C. [*sarcastically*]. I've no doubt I'm a very odd person, but——

Emily [*approaches him*]. You *are*, Charlie! A man that could hold out as you did against your brother on Sunday night must be—well, as you say, odd. I ought to have guessed it earlier. But I didn't. You see, I'm being frank with you.

Sir C. Oh, I see *that*! . . . [*disgustedly*]. Of course it's no use talking a lot of rot to you about reconsidering your decision and all that. . . . I suppose it occurred to you that you're making a fearful mess of my affairs.

Emily. I'm quite sure that I'm avoiding a fearful mess.

Sir C. That's all very fine! That's all very fine! There are some things that I can't talk about. . . . I can't talk about love, for instance. But let me tell you, you don't know what a fearful mess you're making!

Emily. I'm sorry.

Sir C. No, that's just what you aren't. You're glad. You're glad to be out of it. You're jolly glad you've told me and got it over. You look down on me, and I don't know why, upon my soul! You're quite different when you talk to Francis or John. And yet I'm the cleverest chap in our family, by a long chalk. I could wipe the floor with either of my intellectual brothers, any day.

Emily. Charlie, I wish you wouldn't talk like that. I don't look down on you.

Sir C. I'll swear you do. . . . And all this, if you please, because of a newspaper article, one single newspaper article. Where's the common-sense of it? You knew all about me before we were engaged.

Emily. I didn't understand what your system meant.

Sir C. My system! . . . Supposing I say to you that I'll throw up the entire business, leave journalism altogether—and be content to enjoy myself on the miserable interest of a million and a half in first-class securities—what price that for an offer, eh? I'm not much of a drawing-room singer, but what price that for an offer? Will that satisfy you?

Emily. No, I could never agree to such a thing. It would be madness.

Sir C. Now I'm mad! Naturally! Well, you've taken it into your head to ruin my show, and that's an end of it! All I have to do is to shut up and look pleasant. I kept

off women for forty years, and I wish to God I'd kept off 'em for forty-one. I might have known.

Emily [*holding out her hand*]. Good afternoon, Charlie.

Sir C. [*looking at her hand*]. You just take a thing into your head—and, *pstt*, it's all over and done with in a minute!

Emily [*moving away*]. I should think better of you if you didn't go on in this way. You seem to forget that I suffer too.

Sir C. [*more and more carried away*]. And whose fault is that? Is it mine?

Emily. When you talk about "just taking it into my head," you are insulting [*moving towards door*].

Sir C. [*bitterly*]. That's it! Try to put me in the wrong! But you can't. I've not changed. I've never made any pretensions. I've never hidden anything. I've never said I was a moralist. I've never posed as being better than other people. But I've always maintained the right of the public to have what they want, and my right to give 'em what they want.

Emily. Sell—not give.

Sir C. Sell, then.

Emily. No matter what they want?

Sir C. Certainly, so long as it's legal! Supply must meet demand!

Emily. Yes, and I do believe if the sacred public wanted your wife you'd meet the demand! [*Exit,*

back. Sir Charles walks about and lights a cigarette. Enter Kendrick, R.]

Kendrick. Oh, you are back!

Sir C. Yes, what is it?

Kendrick. Well, about this new campaign?

Sir C. [*sits down*]. Sit down. I'll tell you. Can you put your hand on any of those limerick clerks we had to get rid of?

Kendrick. I should think it's quite possible!

Sir C. Well, you might get hold of twenty or so.

Kendrick. What for?

Sir C. For correspondence. It's like this. There are four hundred and fifteen M.P.'s who have declared themselves in favour of Women's Suffrage. And yet nothing is done. Every damned one of those hypocritical rotters has got to be brought fairly to bay, in his own constituency, not here in London, but where he can be frightened.

Kendrick. You may say without exaggeration that this'll be a bit of a job.

Sir C. Yes, it'll keep a few of you employed.

Kendrick. Mr Francis would be useful, I should think. Has he told you he means to stop doing dramatic criticism?

Sir C. No. By the way—— [*Hesitates, as if at a loss.*] See here, Kendrick, I'll go on with this later. I was forgetting. [*Stops again.*] To-morrow morning, eh? [*Rises.*]

Kendrick [*rather puzzled*]. All right. What time?

Sir C. Ten o'clock. [*Kendrick nods and exit, R. Sir Charles opens door, L.*]

Sir C. I say, Frank.

Francis [*off*]. Hello?

Sir C. I just want to speak to you a minute. [*Enter Francis, L.*]

Francis [*self-consciously and hesitatingly*]. Well? [*He shuts door carefully.*]

Sir C. [*after hesitation*]. I hear you intend to give up theatrical criticism?

Francis. Yes.

Sir C. What's the meaning of this new move?

Francis [*with a jocular appearance of being confidential*]. The fact is, I've come to the conclusion I can't stand the actor-manager any longer.

Sir C. Can't stand the actor-manager?

Francis. Merely to see him in his magnificent splendour makes me feel such a worm that it's positively bad for my health. I've stood him as long as I can.

Sir C. I suppose this is a hint that you'll be leaving us altogether soon?

Francis. Well, I never gave you the idea that I should be a permanency, did I? And really, overhauling obituaries isn't what you'd call a feverish joy. As soon as I've got down to W, and attended to you and myself, Lewis Waller, James Welch, John Strange Winter, Wilbur Wright, A. B. Walkley, Mrs Humphry Ward, and a few other important people, it's quite on the cards that I may resume my travels. You've given me a unique time, and taught me all that I didn't know about human nature. Also I've accumulated a pile of money.

Sir C. That's it—you'd better all go together!

Francis. What do you mean?

Sir C. [*in a low voice*]. Emily has thrown me over.

Francis. Look here, Charlie. Of course as I'm your brother I can't boil over in sympathy; but I'm very sorry—really. [*Pause.*]

Sir C. You don't seem exactly staggered.

Francis. N—no. Besides, I knew.

Sir C. Knew? How did you know?

Francis. She's just told me. She came straight into my room.

Sir C. How did she come into your room?

Francis. By the corridor, naturally. She's in there now.

Sir C. Hm! And I suppose you were discussing me inside out. I must say that with *you* Emily was always more——

Francis. No, no! She simply came to consult me about a question that is naturally very much on her mind.

Sir C. What's that—if I'm not being too curious?

Francis. The question of how she is to earn a living, of course! She hasn't a cent, and she's no prospects. She's in a devilish awkward hole.

Sir C. [*after a pause, quietly*]. That's true, and I can't offer her anything. . . . I say, Frank, you must fix that up for me, somehow. It'll have to be done very delicately.

Francis. As you say, very delicately.

Sir C. Of course I can easily find her something pretty handsome—some place that'll keep her for life.

Francis. I don't imagine she'll need it for quite that long.

Sir C. Not need it——

Francis. Well, it'll be a miracle if a woman like Em doesn't marry some one before she's very much older.

Sir C. What does that mean ?

Francis. How do I know ? [*They look at each other. Francis moves towards door.*]

Sir C. Where are you going ?

Francis. I can't leave her in there alone indefinitely.

Sir C. [*after a pause*]. It'll be a lesson to me, I can tell you.

Francis. What will ?

Sir C. All this ! I've done with you superior, intellectual people. I'm going right away on the other tack now. As regards journalism, you shall cater for yourselves.

Francis. Oh ! I expect we shall manage to do that.

Sir C. I don't care if every friend I have leaves me !

Francis. My dear fellow, the great British public is your friend. What more do you require ?

Sir C. You may laugh. But nobody can stop me from going ahead, and I shall end in the House of Lords. [*Prepares to speak into dictaphone.*]

Francis. It is the very place for you, Charlie. No sensible person would think of trying to stop you from going ahead, right *into* the House of Lords. You keep on giving the public what it wants just as long as ever you can. That's your mission in life. Only prepare for the rainy day.

Sir C. What rainy day ?

Francis. The day when the public wants something better than you can give it. [*Exit.*]

Sir C. [*into dictaphone*]. My dear Lady Calder——

[*Curtain.*]

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